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Deconstructing the Gendered Body — Fragmentation and Subjectivity in the Texts of Kathy Acker

by Wendy Foster

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1997**

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ABSTRACT

At the intersection between the notions of gender and sexuality there lies a proliferation of cultural discourses which seek to domesticate and normalize both the “human” and the bodies that are collected together under this designation. The texts of Kathy Acker work performatively to deconstruct the discourses which regulate the gendered body within the socius. Through an examination of Pussy, King of the Pirates, Don Quixote which was a dream, Empire of the Senseless, and Blood and Guts in High School, the politics of the abject body can be understood as a radical reconfiguration of the “subject” and its embodiment within the gendered histories of the “human.”

Dedicated to the memories of Jennifer Gignac and Kirsten Summers

**and with much respect and sadness — Kathy Acker (d. November 30, 1997)
Soon many other Kathys were born and these Kathys covered the earth....**

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Chapter One — Articulating the Posthuman Body

In Thom Jurek's text Straight Fiction the modern city is transformed into the "metrophage," literally the city as virus. Paradoxically familiar and strange, the metrophage articulates the posthuman experience which is marked by its fetishized textuality and its function as a conduit for "desire":

Metrophage: The ceaseless transformation of the city into the posthuman. Piles of ruin are continually tunneled and reformed into an equation of billboards. Central themes are target vehicles for the analysis of entropy, as the body becomes a sum total of cosmetic surgery and replacement parts as the outfit to fulfill any desire. . . .the body begins to die, and transmorgify [sic] into the columnar table of information and dissemination, cancelled by its need to continually replace and remodel without proper understanding of what dies when it is replaced. (86)

The aesthetics of disappearance that signal the emergence of the posthuman within contemporary constructions of virtual culture become, fundamentally, an important means by which to trace the various dissolutions of the body into simulacrum. The "image," the desired, replaces the material, fixed, body of the human "subject." The socio-cultural desire to "know" and thus to both "see" and situate the gendered body is subverted through the morphological possibilities of the posthuman body which, significantly, *uses* its discursivity to deconstruct the notions of gender, class, and race that are placed upon the normative body.

The response of the posthuman body to the signs of the "real" that displace it to the margins of discourse effectually constructs a politics of virtuality that inserts itself into the cracks and fissures of an increasingly disabled humanism. It is at these junctures of separation and absence that Kathy Acker's texts work to question the socio-cultural

mandates of the “human.” The underlying regulatory mechanisms of the “human” which proscribe identity and which produce “subjects” in order to buttress the structures of power that found the “human” are undermined by the inherent “performativity” of the posthuman body. The focus of my examination is the texts of Kathy Acker, specifically Blood and Guts in High School, Don Quixote which was a dream, Empire of the Senseless, and Pussy. King of the Pirates, and their engagement with the tactics of the posthuman as a set of oppositional practices which place all normative strategies of identification under suspicion. The city as a metaphor for the human body that Jurek’s text outlines becomes an issue of textuality in Acker’s works as spatial and temporal configurations which mark the limits and maintenance of the “city” as an organizing principle of the *socius*¹ are increasingly disordered and deconstructed. Jurek’s “metrophage” as a sign of the abjected hyper-real is transfigured in Acker’s texts into a kind of “humanaphage,” the human as an entropic and self-consuming construction of a disabled and disabling social system.

The posthuman occupies the discursive spaces of the “extra,” the “liminal,” the “virtual,” the “abject.” It is an inherently *performative* body that, as Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston suggest, “[is] of the past and future lived as present crisis. This present, this crisis does not glide smoothly along a one-dimensional time-line but erupts or coalesces non-locally across an only partially temporizable realm of meaning” (“Introduction” 4). The

¹

I use the term “*socius*” throughout as it is understood in the works of Deleuze and Guattari. As Brian Massumi clarifies: “A society is a dissipative structure with its own determining tension between a limitative body without organs and a nonlimitative one. Together, in their interaction, they are called a ‘*socius*’ (the abstract machine of society)” (75).

quantum reality of the posthuman body, indicated by its non-locality, points to the very multiplicity of identities that surrounds the production of the body as a discursive entity. The fundamental cultural antagonism that has developed between the “human” and its “monstrous” double is articulated through Acker’s narratives, in particular, Empire of the Senseless, and Pussy, King of the Pirates, which explore the formation of the body as a kind of *hyper-reality*. In Acker’s texts there is no normative body to which one can refer back — all is spectacle, and the posthuman body exposes the mechanisms of desire that produce the spectacular. This transposition of the “human” body into the “posthuman” will be traced across the texts of Kathy Acker.

The “transgressive” movements which underlie the critique of representational practices within the “arts” and within a broader cultural perspective are important in order to contextualize both the actively performative posthuman body and Acker’s texts in relation to the body as a contested site of “meaning.” The seeming “impotence” of transgression within the postmodern condition, as theorized by Stephanie Watson, points to the re-location of modes of control from the “outside” to the “inside.” As Watson suggests:

Scientists search for a ‘real’ and hidden, internal visibility (invisible to the naked eye) which will confirm the limits of identity. . . . This is an act of limitation which inverts its own criteria by relying on a ‘depth’ model of identity which is invisible, but gives visibility through microscopic magnification. Yet this search for an invisible core of identity remains open to a visible transgression via artists who are constantly exposing these ‘new’ certainties as constructs. (“The Transgressive Aesthetic” 37)

As Acker’s texts show, the very structural integrity of the “human” is itself perhaps our most fundamental illusion. Acker’s textual bodies are amorphous and shifting, blurring traditional demarcations between inside and outside, subject and object, and male and

female. The body, thus compromised, articulates itself outside of the confines of normative subjectivity, even as it marks its parodic complicity with the mechanisms that produce and regulate subjectivity itself. Specifically, in Acker's texts, the inscription of gendered desire is inverted in that her "female" protagonists use obscenity often self-referentially, or, to designate other "women" as part-objects, as "cunts." Thus, within Acker's textual universe, the question of who "owns" and controls the phallogentric gaze is ambiguated.

In Chapter Two, "Feminism's Anxiety: Postmodernism and the Gendered Body (A Little Bit of Pussy), I discuss the fundamental points of intersection that exist between the projects of feminism and postmodernism. Acker's text, Pussy, King of the Pirates, in its re-formulation of the histories of the gendered body offers a posthumanist challenge to the materialist feminist claims of embodied subjectivity. As well, Pussy questions the assumption that gender is a "natural" and hence inescapable component of the "human." In Acker's text the female gendered body is an abject space within which the "obscene" functions to dismantle the systems of identification that place the body within the limits of the social.

To enter into a deconstructive engagement with the gendered body necessitates an inquiry into the language which "identifies" and thus "fixes" and naturalizes conceptualizations of "masculinity" and "femininity." To examine the construction of the "Cunt" within Western systems of identification is perhaps to enter into Hélène Cixous' theorization of the "utopic" body which ironically reverses those situations of power and desire in which the "female" object is subordinated to the "male gaze" which orders and designates. As Cixous notes: "Women haven't had eyes for themselves. They haven't gone exploring in their house.

Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven't dared enjoy, have been colonized. Woman is disgusted by woman and fears her" ("Sorties" 68). Acker's ironic mode of confronting normative systems takes Cixous' argument and re-presents it in order to provide a commentary upon Western representational practices, and perhaps more tellingly, upon traditional feminisms which reject the body as a site of gendered abjection. For, in Acker's texts, it is the figure of the "mother" who is "Cunt," and absent enemy, a figuration which parodically answers to Cixous' assertion that, "[o]ne trend of current feminist thought tends to denounce a trap in maternity that would consist of making the mother-woman an agent who is more or less the accomplice of reproduction: capitalist, familialist, phallocentrist reproduction" (89). What Acker, in line with Cixous, reveals is an abject world of bracketed identities that points back to a Western socio-cultural fascination with the spectacle of the Oedipal paradigm.

Chapter Three, "The Fragmented Body: Subjectivity and Body Discourse in Don Quixote which was a dream," seeks to examine the social encryption processes that "fix" the gendered body within the human. Acker, here, critiques the essential oedipalizing ordering systems that structure Western thought. The relationship between the "human" and the agentic, empirical "self" is deconstructed through Don Quixote's re-ordering of the discourses of legitimation upon which the human body is founded. Acker's modification of heterosexual love as a literary enterprise focuses attention upon the essentializing strategies of canonicity. By disordering both the canonical treatments of "love" and the historiographical premises upon which "Woman" is constructed in relation to "Man," Acker uncovers not only the heterosexist structuring of the socius but, as well, the gaps and deficiencies within which the

processes of “becoming-gendered” are problematized and questioned as illusory identities.

What is at stake in Acker’s deconstructive readings of the mythologies that impel Western culture’s narratives is the “place” of the “female” body. Acker charts the displacement of the “feminine” in the Oedipal narrative and its consequences for “female” identity which becomes located in the body. In the iconography of the Oedipus myth the “female” body is figured as a site of fluctuation and ambiguity. Here, the play between the authentic and the false body of the mother articulates the contingent nature of gender. For instance, although Iocaste is Oedipus’ “natural” mother, he does not “know” or perceive her as such, thus complicating the issue of incest that has defined the Oedipal myth within Western cultural discourse. In the Oedipus myth, the displacement of the “female” body is marked by the discursive marginalization of the *passively inscripted locastean body*.

The passivity ascribed to Iocaste is in constant tension with her noted tendency to “deceive,” and to actively create and manipulate both her own and other bodies, “ [Laius] put Iocaste away, though without offering any reason for his decision, which caused her such vexation that, having made him drunk, she inveigled him into her arms again as soon as night fell” (Graves 371). Performativity, as an integral aspect of the posthuman body, is also an important part of Iocaste’s inscription into the Oedipal mythology. The double or contradictory logic of the locastean body complicates the erasure of “female” presence and agency within the Oedipal structure. The “female” body within this mythic paradigm is replicated thematically in terms of a series of negations that control the text of Oedipus. Thus, Iocaste, the general “absence,” or “supplement,” in Derridean terms, subverts masculinist claims to “presence” as exemplified in Laius’ death by the hand of his own

displaced “product,” Oedipus, and in Oedipus’ blinding and subsequent exile from the “place” of patriarchal authority, the throne.

The “feminine” as “absence” is also prefigured by Oedipus’ conquest over the Sphinx, the ironic event which contextualizes his destined downfall. The violation of the locastean body in the Oedipal text is necessary for the maintenance of a hegemonic, patriarchal order, but it is here, as well, that the “female” body’s paradoxical logic acts. At once necessary and under erasure, this female gendered body becomes the single motive force which guides the narrative. As in Acker’s texts, within which the body of the mother is simultaneously absent and omnipresent, liberated and enslaved, the figure of Iocaste explores the complex relation that exists between bodies both inside and outside the socius. What becomes important to note is Acker’s emphasis upon the dispersal of the gendered body as it is translated into the posthuman, and the way this body takes flight, both from within and from without the text.

The posthuman, anti-Oedipal body, as the locus of an ambiguous and ironic “female” subjectivity, is isolated by Acker whose texts explore the economy of language and sexuality as destructive and constructive areas of gendered identity discourse. The body is thus represented as a kind of Nietzschean “becoming,” an act itself which does not end with destruction but involves creations and re-creations as “process,” which may be the state for which de Lauretis’ “feminist subject” is an articulation. My analysis differs from both Cixous and Teresa de Lauretis in the invocation of the “subject-object” state against the assertion of “Woman” (as theorized by Cixous), and the “feminist subject” (the political priority of both Cixous and de Lauretis). It seems no longer fruitful, nor adequate, to posit

either a stable subject of feminist discourse, or a monolithic category of “Woman” from which to elicit a “subject” position. The “subject,” imbued as it is with a kind of self-apparent “wholeness,” and “coherence” requires a deconstruction of its “value,” and its ability to confer a politicized, “vocal” status upon “those” who have been granted its social and cultural powers. The “subject-object,” as a state of flux within which identities variously “become” only to re-involve themselves, before completion, into new configurations, seems a more useful site or set of sites from which to examine the political economies of gender and sexuality in Kathy Acker’s texts. Ultimately, the subject-object calls into question the primacy of the “human” itself in Western modes of thought and those categories of identity which variously indicate and bind the socio-cultural limits of the human.

In Chapter Four, “The Spectacle of the Simulacra: Virtual Bodies and Virtual Subjectivities in Empire of the Senseless,” I will interrogate the structures of the human and their control over modes of identification and “being.” The potential of the virtual subject-object to disrupt the construction of the “armored” subject is examined as a reaction formation to the crisis of the human in contemporary discourse. The subject-object becomes a way to reveal the socio-cultural “processes” that produce embodied identities such as gender. The counter-aesthetics of the posthuman body, which Acker’s text works *through*, are marked by the performances of the abject, of the transgressive impulses of the subject-object which, as Teresa de Lauretis theorizes, is a matter of “process:” “[t]he subject of feminism that I have in mind is one *not* so defined, one whose definition or conception is in progress . . .” (Technologies of Gender 10).

The multiple selves of the posthuman “subject-object” articulate a “rhizomatic”² relationship which fluctuates between and merges the “I” and the “not-I” which, as Rosemary Jackson details, addresses the often conflicting philosophical and psychoanalytical categorizations of “human” identity and “being.” “Whereas themes of the self, the ‘I’, deal with problems of *consciousness*, of vision and perception, themes of the other, the ‘not-I’ deal with problems generated by desire, by the *unconscious*. The relation of self to other is mediated through desire . . . ” (Fantasy 51). As Acker’s textual bodies reveal, the “subject-object” is both simultaneously the “I” and the “not-I,” both “recognizable,” and at the same time, “strange.” This emergent positionality is “rhizomatic” in that it instantiates connections across and through borders that separate the “human” from the “monstrous,” the “subject” from the “object,” and the “inside” from the “outside.” It is, importantly, an abject set of connections and sites that are often ironic, self-referential, and parodic.

The subject-object, as well, is “criminal” in the sense that Carolyn J. Dean outlines according to the theoretical analyses of Lacan:

Crime . . . designates what Lacan called the “limits of signification” . . . the limits, that is, of the various representational structures that constitute the self. The cause of crime is an attempted cure that is always a form of pathology, always a slippage of the subject into the open rift of madness, which, in her endless attempts to reconcile reality and ideal, endlessly re-presents the self. (53-54)

Acker’s textual bodies are “criminal” because they refuse their pathologization, their

2

As Deleuze and Guattari theorize, “[a] rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (A Thousand Plateaus 7).

cultural designations. They are removed from the binarisms of gender formulations, they are sexually minoritarian bodies — incestuous daughters, whores, sexual and social terrorists — they are “anti-” or “counter-social,” and “counter-epistemological.” They are “becomings” which point to the potentials of the posthuman body which is itself multiple and self-contradictory: “As Lacan put it, crime describes a paradoxical movement toward liberty which, because it is itself a form of madness, is always a prison. Madness is a form of liberty and yet also marks its limits” (Dean 53). And, as Acker suggests in Blood and Guts in High School, “[w]e all live in prison. Most of us don’t know we live in prison” (65). “Humanity” and its concomitant institutions construct an always already manifest prison of “presence” that the criminalized posthuman body subverts through its very resistance to those legitimating structures which contain and limit its potential capacities for “becomings.”

The problematics of the socially identified body are addressed in Chapter Five, “The Body Confessed: Revaluating the Politics of Masochism in Blood and Guts in High School. Chapter Five seeks to articulate a politics of masochism that answers to some of the questions that popularizations of the masochistic body raise. The mechanisms of the confession as a strategy of the posthuman in its interaction with various manifestations of sexual and social masochisms becomes an integral part of the revaluation of the criminalized body that I attempt to theorize. Acker’s construction of Janey operates, within the text of Blood and Guts, to elucidate the contradictory positionality of the gendered female body within the socius. Janey exposes the oedipalized impulses of the social as they are inscribed upon her body. Janey’s body is always already threatened, it is both necessary and

marginalized by the social relationships to which it is subject.

The recuperation of the posthuman body by the *socius* is always imminent and part of the complex mechanisms by which the nomadic posthuman operates. As Deleuze and Guattari warn: “You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject — anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions” (A Thousand Plateaus 9). Within Acker’s texts these dangers are embodied and entrenched in representations of the social — the police state, the heterosexual “love” relationship, the domesticated body, for example. The ability to *evade* or manipulate these normalizing constructions is the project of the posthuman body which is both subversive of and complicitous with the regulatory structures that threaten to impinge upon the “free” circulation of identities.

It is the construction of the gendered, and otherwise *identified* body that Acker’s texts chart through the popular iconography of American culture. As Paula Rabinowitz notes, the posthuman body “[stresses] the constructedness and historically contingent nature of gender and sexual identities” (102). By emphasizing the body as a site of performance and of spectacularity, the posthuman reveals the built in excesses and hyper-representationality of the “real,” and the “normative,” thus exposing the fictionality of the “real’s” claims to coherence and stability, its ordered and rational design. Acker’s “characters” are non-linear, and themselves amorphous and fluctuating. They move in and through cultural “histories” constructing alternate universes out of snatched moments and disparate timelines to expose, in the process, this “contingent nature” of human identity. Thus, in Blood and

Guts in High School, Janey interacts fluidly with Jean Genet and Jimmy Carter and envisions a political state of free love and anarchy under the government of the pop star Prince. The body, within Acker's texts, is not confined to either spatial or temporal absolutes. The posthuman body, specifically, exceeds both.

The "reinforced" subject is that entrenched condition that the posthuman critiques. By dissolving the distinction between subject and object, or self and other, the posthuman threatens the subject's apprehension of itself as a stable and coherent identity. Interestingly, the deconstruction of the subject by the posthuman, and the subject's subsequent desire to buttress its foundations within the socius enacts the "threat of the Lacanian mirror stage" which, as Helga Geyer-Ryan outlines, "... threatens the subject with two extremes, which will influence every relationship between subject and other: the vanishing of the subject as a consequence of the subject's identification with the other or the aggressive rigidity of the subject as a resistance to the overpowering other" (123). This linkage suggests both the pathologization of the posthuman project — it is aberrant and nihilistic — as well as inferring, by extension, that the situation of the "subject" within this phase of "late capitalism," "postmoderism," "post-industrialism," or whichever metaphor one chooses to use to designate the socio-cultural milieu of our "present," is a situation in which the "subject" as a politically agentic entity is imperiled. Contemporary Western culture's "hyperreality" has been theorized by cultural critics such as Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, and Scott Bukatman, who trace the trajectories of this newly "armored" subject across the territories of the body as it is mutated, converted, and infinitely doubled in the process of "becoming-virtual." The "armored," or hyper-actualized "subject" against which the

posthuman is positioned, is fetishized by a culture that fears the loss of its central organizing principles.

The virtualized effects of the posthuman subject-object elucidate what Arthur Kroker terms “the specularity of the fetish” (SPASM 37) in which questions of the “self” are reduced to a matter of “aesthetics” (38). As Kroker points out, “[d]isappearing into its own trompe l’oeil, the electronic vortex of the floating self is finally liberated of (fixed) identity, of (determinate) gender, of (localized) history, and of (bodily) subjectivity” (38). This process is both amenable to and deconstructive of contemporary feminist theorizations of embodied subjectivity (Grosz³, Braidotti), and critiques of gender construction within Western cultural paradigms (Butler, de Lauretis). There is a sense, with the posthuman, of a radical revaluation of politicized sites such as the body and the subject, and of their adequacy as liberatory “essences.” Judith Butler articulates this shift and the problematic status of traditional feminisms which rely upon the stability of the “subject” as a space from which to advance “political” action:

Against this postmodernism, there is an effort to shore up the primary premises, to establish in advance that any theory of politics requires a subject, needs from the start to presume its subject, the referentiality of language, the integrity of the institutional descriptions it provides. For politics is unthinkable without a foundation, without these premises. (“Contingent Foundations” 3)

Posthuman performances, which are themselves implicated in the postmodern project, launch the same critique that Butler levels against the “closed” domain of the “political.”

3

As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, “[c]orporeality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity, and the subordinated term in the opposition, can move to its rightful place in the very heart of the dominant term, mind” (Space, Time, and Perversion 103).

My analysis of the following texts proposes to trace this emergent consideration of the spaces which are excluded by the subject — the abject, the obscene — those territories which have always already been both the locus for the objectified body and for the subject as “voyeur.”

The dynamic that exists between the voyeuristic subject and the object as exhibition underlies Acker’s critique of the systems of representation that govern Western thought, and form the basis for her conceptualization of the “subject-object.” The subject-object is itself a self-reflexive deterritorialization of socio-culturally instituted identities. In Acker’s text Don Quixote, this movement of the subject-object is apparent in Don Quixote’s shifting in and out of history and gender “roles” in order to reveal the modes of domination which structure heterosexuality within Western culture. The act of “becoming-other,” or of becoming both subject and object simultaneously, both male and female, is for Don Quixote a necessary re-location in order for her to “understand” and “navigate” through the mechanisms of gender and desire that are produced by the normalizing socius. As in Blood and Guts in High School, the function of “writing” operates to deconstruct culturally constructed identities, exposing their inherent contingencies and limitations.

Both Don Quixote and Janey in Blood and Guts re-write the gendered “histories” of “Woman” in order to ironically comment upon the operations of culture as they are inscribed upon the “human” body. To deconstruct the monolithic “Woman” is to uncover the *differently* enacted potentials of the posthuman body. The posthuman is neither “intelligible” nor “stable” and is thus able to dislodge the subject from its metaphysical foundations. The subject thus merged with its object “other” becomes aberrant, and self-

contradictory, an “illogic” that is bound up with the posthuman’s emphasis upon the performative. Feminisms which posit a universalized, gendered subject as the basis for an emancipatory politics become, effectually, politics which base themselves upon exclusion. A politics of exclusion merely recuperates the patriarchal subject, marginalizing the object position and reinforcing socio-culturally entrenched gender distinctions. The posthuman, conversely, emphasizes the agency of object practices, an agency that is normatively ascribed to the function of the subject as a politically active and “voiced” entity, and is thus traditionally denied to the object position. The transformed bodies in Acker’s texts parodically articulate the various discourses of the “feminine” that inform the construction of the subject and the object in Western culture. The critique of gendered identity as a signifier of subjectivity and thus political agency points, importantly, to a de-naturalized or non-essentialist body that follows the hidden narratives of the hybrid, the polymorphous, and the posthuman.

Acker’s texts practice a politics of *effacement* upon the codes of representation that constitute the “human,” and that institute the coherent “I.” As Alphonso Lingis suggests:

The corporeal substance that breathes, moves, looks, and feels is a field of disparate processes continually shifting, intensifying, and discharging forces. But the body that says “I” takes the physical signifier “I” to be phenomenally the same and takes it to mean the same each time that body utters it — and takes the referent of that “I” to abide, constant, across the flow of duration, and in the intervals between its being attended to. The body that makes a sign of itself, that makes itself a sign, idealizes itself. (*Foreign Bodies* 109)

Such is the domesticating influence of the subject upon the posthuman body. The universalized “specificity” of the “I” denies the performativity of the body in order to claim a “subject” that is simultaneously unique and the same — “unique” because of the mythos

of the autonomous individual that signifies the “spirit” of the American subject and the “same” because of a posited “shared humanity” which is marked by the “progressive,” and “humanist” ideals of rational order and reason.

The deconstruction of the ideal “I” in Acker’s texts point away from conceptualizations of the stable subject as a site of a politicized priority and toward the body as an “uncertainty.” The posthuman body cannot be specified, or identified in terms of the “self,” or the “I,” because it is amorphous and shifting — a kind of actualization of Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle” wherein the act of “measuring” irretrievably changes that which is being measured, demonstrating the fundamental futility of “knowing” anything with absolute “certainty.” The identified body is thus a fallacy of the socius because it is always already implicated in the indeterminate, in the realm of “becoming” as process. The posthuman body escapes, subverts, and deconstructs its normative epistemological and ontological status because of its emphasis upon and practice of identity as a series of interchangeable fictionalities and performances.

The concluding chapter of my investigation, “Mobilizing the Outlawed Body,” traces the possibilities of transgression as a narrative tactic in Acker’s texts. The emergence of the posthuman as a theoretical concern within Acker’s works operates according to new modes of “seeing” and their relation to desiring-production. The posthuman performs itself according to the shifting nature of the mobilized gaze which is itself pathologized by the normalizing socius.

The emerging discursive tactics of the posthuman offer alternative approaches to the discussions surrounding the production of the gendered subject. The posthuman project,

of which the texts of Kathy Acker are a part, explore the aporetic sites of polysexualities and transgenderisms as a part-response to the increasing mobilization of the “armored” subject against the incursions of the “inhuman” into Western cultural systems. Acker’s textual engagements with the posthuman become a way to think through the potentials of the subject-object as a positionality from which to articulate a politics of the spectacular, and a revaluation of the abject as a site of embodied power.

The violence that is signaled by the state of abjection points to the implosion of the subject as a process of “de-idealization.” The abject, as Julia Kristeva outlines, is that “ ‘I’ overcome by the corpse For it is death that most violently represents the strange state in which a non-subject, a stray, having lost its non-objects, imagines nothingness through the ordeal of abjection” (*Powers of Horror* 25). The deconstruction of the gendered body is , at least partially, a commitment to enter the abject. The abject is not an end point, but perhaps the “illogical” telos of a failed humanism that constructs the abject as a repository for bodies that are excluded from or marginalized by the socius. It is thus a central consideration of Acker’s texts, and my own engagement with Acker’s project, to explore the way the spaces of the abject are inscribed on and by bodies whose territorial limits have been compromised.

What is ultimately at issue is the concept of agency and precisely “who” or “what” is capable of constituting gender, and how. My analysis takes up Judith Butler’s theorizations on the construction of gender and the subversion of its regulatory nature. Butler posits that “[i]f the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a

disruption of their universal posturing" (Gender Trouble 32). What Butler suggests is that the flaw lies in the binarism of the accepted categories of gender. In order to transform and "liberate" the body from the confines of a carefully structured and ordered relational gender system, the body must play with the fictional "limits" of identity in order to show that gender is a potentially infinite performance. If gender is a discursive construction that is acted out and capable of being "read" differently, then perhaps its ultimate transformation lies within the transgressive intertextuality of Acker's works through which the meta-narratives of the posthuman body are articulated.

Chapter Two — Feminism's Anxiety: Postmodernism and the Gendered Body (A Little Bit of Pussy)

**I'm not a NORMAL GIRL
I'm an angry sweaty girl
so bite me
and suck my not normal flesh. (Estep 21)**

Feminism and postmodernism stand in an often uneasy relationship with one another. Traditionalist feminisms, on one hand, insists upon the construction of a female gendered subject to provide a constituency from which political action is arrayed. Postmodernism, on the other hand, calls the constitution of such subjects into question, critiquing the universalizing and totalizing foundations upon which the notion of the "subject" rests. It thus becomes clear that the question of subjectivity is integral to the debate between feminists and postmodernists, and perhaps most significantly, to feminists who situate themselves within postmodern discourse. Rey Chow, in "Postmodern Automations," locates the site of tension between postmodernism and feminism in the postmodern deconstruction of notions of the "real" that found the concept of a stable feminist subject: "For some [feminists], the destabilization of conceptual boundaries and concrete beliefs becomes the sign of danger that directly threatens their commitment to an agenda of social progress based on self and reason" (103). Feminist assertions of an embodied, gendered subject as the prerequisite for a concrete politics of intervention into a masculinist, patriarchal order are disrupted by postmodernism's critique of the necessity of subjecthood to effect political action or agency.

The construction of a feminist bodily subjectivity in opposition to a masculinist

subjectivity that is rooted in consciousness, as seen in the theorizations of Rosi Braidotti, opens itself to the same criticisms that it itself, as a feminist project, seeks to maintain against a hegemonic, patriarchalized subjectivity. Braidotti asserts:

Following Adrienne Rich, in fact, I believe that the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral and consequently gender free. This 'positional' or situated way of seeing the subject states that the most important location or situation is the locating of the subject into the spatial frame of the body. The first and foremost of locations in reality is one's own embodiment. Rethinking the body as our primary situation is the starting point for the epistemological side of the 'politics of location,' which aims at elucidating the discourse produced by female feminists. (182)

Although Braidotti insists that it is the subject that is rooted in language, the "thinking 'I,'" that universalizes being, the grounding of the subject in a materialist discourse that locates gender in biology, in the sexed body, is problematic as well. Both classical, patriarchal theories of subjectivity, as well as Braidotti's own conception of subjectivity seek to present a kind of objective truth that postmodernism sees as limiting. Thus, for postmodern theorists, "Unity appears as an effect of domination, repression, and the temporary success of rhetorical strategies. All knowledge construction is fictive and non-representational. As a product of the human mind, knowledge has no necessary relation to Truth or the Real" (Flax 454). The construction of epistemological strategies, regardless of whether or not they are based upon the constitution of the subject in the body or the mind, rests on the contentious assumption that there exist real and transparent, or "natural," truths, which, moreover, are obtainable. The presupposition of "essential" truths reflects the metaphysics of presence that underlies the construction of a Western, phallogocentric subject — the theory that there exists a "natural" ontological desire, "[a] structural need [by women] to

posit themselves as female subjects, that is to say, not as disembodied entities but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings" (Braidotti 182).

Epistemological projects, in themselves, are viewed as misrepresentative and totalizing discourses by a postmodernism which advocates not necessarily the death of the subject as a location for political agency, but an institution of fluid subjectivities that acknowledge their inherent constructedness within discourse(s), and thus point to the inability to "know" the body in any formal way. The postmodern self blurs the boundaries that separate "subject" from "object." The disruption of subjectivity that the postmodern self enacts calls into question the production of normative identities. Hegemonic orderings of identity reinforce the regulation of agency through the "subject," serving, in effect, to buttress the docile, socialized self against the incursions of the posthuman. The production of the humanist subject is examined by Judith Butler who notes:

In a sense, the epistemological model that offers us a pregiven subject or agent is one that refuses to acknowledge that *agency is always and only a political prerogative*. As such, it seems crucial to question the conditions of its possibility, not to take it for granted as an a priori guarantee. We need instead to ask, what possibilities of mobilization are produced on the basis of existing configurations of discourse and power? ("Contingent Foundations" 13)

For feminist theorists such as Butler, there is a need to examine the foundationalist claims that traditional feminisms have posited, a willingness, in effect, to locate the limitations of a feminism based on the identification of and "affinity" of "women" as an oppressed group. Butler calls into question the claim that patriarchy is the monolithic cause of "women's" oppression. For Butler, traditional, or "first wave," feminist theories seek to homogenize "women," not only through the false, and tenuous, construction of "affinities," but, as well,

by modeling a feminist politics upon pre-existing patriarchal structures which posit a "subject" as a given prerequisite from which "human" experience is measured, ordered, and examined.

The interpellation of feminist and postmodernist theories of oppression is capable of providing an examination of each other's inherent gaps and limitations that can work together to construct oppositional epistemologies, or anti-epistemologies, that are self-reflexive. The necessity for self-criticism within theoretical discourses becomes a mandate for a feminist-postmodernist approach to issues of gender, race, sexuality, and class. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, in "Social Criticism Without Philosophy," note as well that a

... postmodern-feminist theory would dispense with the idea of a subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. (34-35)

This is not to consider these identificatory terms as interchangeable in order to fulfil some arbitrary equation, but to acknowledge that monolithic categories such as "Woman" are insufficient to address the multivalent positions and identities that the self operates in and through. As theorizations of the "posthuman" body suggest, the self which acknowledges its own inherent discursivity is capable of revealing the normalizing impulses of conventional categorizations of identity. A feminist-postmodernist theory would perform itself critically. In addition, a feminist-postmodernist approach would value multiplicity and heterogeneity, and would be self-critical of its own gaps, aporias, and discursivity.

The postmodern fragmentation of the subject that critiques feminist epistemologies based on gender (gender which is posited as either a biological attribute of the body, or gender as

a pregiven and thus unalterable condition of acculturated bodies within the socius), seeks to subvert the repressive and dominating strategies inherent in the formation of affinities and unities based on one common, homogenizing denominator. Feminisms, as epistemological practices, need to be aware of the potentiality for reproducing boundaries that exclude and create gaps within feminist theories of emancipation:

Philosophers and other knowledge constructors should seek instead to generate an infinite "dissemination" of meanings. They should abjure any attempt to construct a closed system in which the other or the "excess" are "pushed to the margins" and made to disappear in the interest of coherence and unity. Their task is to disrupt and subvert rather than (re-)construct totalities or grand theories. Post-modernists must firmly situate themselves as constructs within their own discourses. The imperial, impersonal, Cartesian ego is to be deconstructed and its desires set free to play within and as language. The "view from nowhere" is replaced by admittedly partial and fragmentary multiples of one. (Flax 454)

The universalizing tendencies of some materialist feminist theory is a consequence of its need to position itself against subjectivities rooted in theories of consciousness. The danger, however, lies in the potential for reconstructing dualistic conceptions of "being" that, rather than deconstruct illusory oppositions, merely replace one term with another, replicating in the process the same power structures and hierarchies that have traditionally subordinated the body to the mind.

The textualization of bodies in recent cultural studies projects provides a way to theorize and locate moments and spaces of repression that occur as an effect of discourse. The body, no longer considered either natural or constructed in exclusivity, is conceptualized in terms of its complicity with, as well as its subversion of, identificatory strategies:

The proletarianization or automatization of the body with respect to "discursivity" is an anxious reaction-formation to the "loss" of an autonomy that was itself an exclusive fiction. Posthuman bodies are not slaves to master discourses but

emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context. (Halberstam and Livingston 2)

The formulation of the posthuman body becomes of particular importance in texts such as those of Kathy Acker that theorize the body as boundary play, in constant flux between subject and object positions.

Posthumanity effectively theorizes the concept of the performative, hybrid, body that has been articulated by cultural critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Donna Haraway. The hybrid body critiques the universalizing tendencies of the unified, coherent, and "knowing" subject that is constructed within a normalizing socius:

For the subject to be a pregiven point of departure for politics is to defer the question of the political construction and regulation of the subject itself; for it is important to remember that subjects are constituted through exclusion, that is, through the creation of a domain of deauthorized subjects, presubjects, figures of abjection, populations erased from view. (Butler, "Contingent Foundations" 13)

The formation of the "subject" is naturalized because it is assumed as a given. The hybridic or posthuman body deconstructs the imposed identity that the construction of subjectivity implies. The posthuman is not "a" feminist subject, "a" Marxist subject, "an" Enlightenment subject. Indeed, the posthuman body is capable of containing, potentially, different aspects of all these various subjectivities at different moments, perhaps even at one moment. Posthumanity is not limited by containing itself within one unitary mode of discourse, "subject" to the rules that govern one particular discourse, as it were. The posthuman "subject/object," instead, remains ambiguous, parodying the hyper-representational strategies of the "subject" that fears its own dissolution, that fears, as Scott Bukatman maintains, "... that the human has become obsolete, last year's model" (208).

The move into the theoretical space of a decidedly posthuman feminism affords not only a critique of traditional feminist projects and their totalizing tendencies, but takes the feminist agenda to a new theoretical space — a space in which to consider a virtual and a cyborg politics. This unfolding site of representation within the circuits of “information” technologies requires interventions and “lines of flight” that are rooted in postmodern critiques of the territorialization of representation and the reproduction of representational practices. In a virtual world that promises: “There is no race . . . there are no genders . . . there is no age . . . there are no infirmities . . . there are only minds . . . Utopia?”(MCI), feminist, postcolonialist, postmodern and posthumanist incursions are necessary, not only to evaluate the rhetoric of the “virtual,” but to chart the dissolution of the body into a network of circuitry that such rhetoric prophecies. The construction of virtual “selves” and virtual “subjectivities” are formulations that are correlative to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “the body without organs,” and to ways of theorizing Acker’s breakdown and reconstruction of the gendered self. Acker’s Empire of the Senseless, in particular, with its parody of the “cyberspace cowboy,” necessitates a consideration, not only of the function of gendered and racialized identities within technological structures, but of the cyborg body and its inherent ambiguity within these structures as well.

Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of the decentered subject, the “nomad,” is written into Acker’s texts in terms of the text’s inner logic of resistance to the same organizing Oedipal structures that Deleuze and Guattari critique. It is the nomad’s struggle against normalization and territorialization that manifests itself in Acker’s characters with their fluid, shifting, identities. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, “. . . there does not exist a pure

nomad who can be afforded the satisfaction of drifting with the flows and singing direct filiation, but always a socius waiting to bear down, already deducting and detaching" (149).

Douglas Shields Dix utilizes Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the nomad by tracing the moments of excess and escape that Acker's texts create. Her texts construct a posthuman politics of the personal that puts notions of subjectivity and fixed identity into question:

The history of women that Acker explores (HISTORY AND WOMEN) is the segmented entrapment of women in a hierarchical power relation to men; however, there is a possibility of moving beyond these segmentations. . . . Death is history's opposite because it represents the outside, the void, the absence of the values that have created history to begin with. In the war between the genders that makes up this history, the alternatives seem to be to join the social order or to be annihilated by daring to step outside it. . . . ("Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*" 57)

Ideas of annihilation, the suicided self, the gendered body's "death instinct," problematize traditional feminist claims such as Braidotti's that locate the essence of "woman" in her body, specifically, her gendered body. It is precisely this socially coded body that Acker's protagonists seek to escape; hence, their indeterminacy, their posthumanity.

As Acker's texts reveal, the gendered body is not simply a spatial location, as Braidotti insists; it is inscribed, as well, by "History," and defined in terms of its construction within a linear, historically framed, temporality. The body within the socius bears the marks of the "past." It is not that Braidotti's assertion of a materialist politics of identity is not important; it is essential to reevaluate the foundations of subjectivity in Western culture. What is at issue, however, is the re-centering of the subject, albeit in a different form. The subject rooted in the body is no less problematic than the subject that is rooted in consciousness. It is the very *fixity*, the constructed stability and primacy of the "subject" as a center for and

ordering of identity, that Acker's texts, and postmodern critiques of essentialism, address.

The gendered body is both a spatially and temporally defined place. It is the interrelation of these forces upon the body that Acker plays with in her texts — the forces that are displaced and distorted in the desire to construct the anti-oedipal self. The problematics of early feminist scholarship (Chodorow, Gilligan) which focused, implicitly or explicitly, on the experiences of middle-class white women tended to elide or ignore how issues of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class intersect with gender issues on levels that are not specifically, or monolithically, a question of patriarchal dominance/oppression. Although a critique of patriarchal/masculinist structures is an important and necessary project, it is politically limited. Acker's inherently textual bodies become sites upon which the conflicts of theorizations of identity are acted out. They "perform" identity, thereby locating and revealing the end points of essentializing notions of "self." Acker's bodies seek to go beyond the limits of socio-culturally constructed identities, and to explore a process of becoming-nomadic, rhizomatic. Sometimes they are successful. This is the dynamic potential of Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs" which resists striated, containing structures, but is always in danger of being recuperated by the *socius*.

The focus on the subversive potential of the performative body as a disruptive, eruptive, "space" in Acker's texts places her narratives within the context of the genre of the "fantastic." The unstable nature of fantasy literature

... points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent.' (Jackson 4)

Acker's texts push beyond the limits of these "brief moments" of disorder, for they are maps of the chaotic body of the posthuman. The gaps which are "performed" in Acker's works question the production of the "real" by making it an effect of discourse — by constructing identities that are traumatized and abject *through* their contact with a unifying, and universalizing, "real." The "fantastic," shifting, identities in Acker's fictions are entropic. In the desire for the dissolution of identities, in the " [move] towards an imaginary zero condition, without time or space, a condition of entropy, the fantastic produces an 'other' region. . .the result of pure transgression" (79).

In Pussy King of the Pirates, Acker dissolves the boundary that separates the self and the other, the human and the nonhuman. In the transgression of these normative, culturally constructed limits, the gendered body becomes the space of fantasy. The gendered body is produced (that is, concretized) through its insertion into a masculinized and heterosexualized sociality: "Inside the brothel, the women, however they actually look, are always beautiful to men. Because they fulfill their fantasies. In this way, what was known as the *male regime*, in the territory named *women's bodies*, separated its reason from its fantasy" (8). The "fantasy" represents an alternate way of "knowing" and thereby of locating the gendered body in terms of the institutions that order and regulate identity. The gendered "female" body in Pussy is contained within the socially marginalized space of the brothel, a space which celebrates the play of sexual excess and spectacle. The body of the prostitute/woman is amorphous, and thus eternal/infinite. The body of the prostitute/woman is the idealization of space and time — a mythologized "fantasy" that disrupts the "real."

The gendered body is a contradictory space that constructs trajectories outside of its

socially determined identity in order to produce a plurality of meanings and locations for itself. The hyper-sexualized, hyper-territorialized, bodies of the prostitutes within a normative, socio-cultural, context are deconstructed by Acker's narrative:

Ange, St. Barbara, Louise Vanaen de Voringhem, and the rest of the whores learned that if language or words whose meanings seem definite are dissolved into a substance of multiple gestures and cries, a substance which has a more direct, a more visceral capacity for expression, then all the weight that the current social, political, and religious hegemonic forms of expression carry will be questioned. Become questionable. Finally, lost.

The weight of culture: questioned and lost. (11)

The act of naming here is problematized. The gendered body is fragmented and dismembered because the coherence and stability of language systems are put into question. The marginalized position of the sexual body is transgressed and transformed as it appropriates the very organizing structures that seek to define and contain it.

The liberatory process of complexifying meaning, of opening language and the body up to the possibilities of their material and temporal placings, is articulated by Hélène Cixous who theorizes the interventions of the gendered body into cultural productions:

To write. An act that will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the super-egoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty. (*Medusa* 225)

The guilty pleasures of the body that actively inscribes itself outside of hegemonic culture are explored by Acker's narrative constructions. The language of obscenity, of the abject, is *made* immediate because it disperses the illusions of transparency and homogeneity that normative language acts posit. The "pirate girls" in *Pussy* "steal" language and its

“potency,” or power, for their own purposes, their own adventures, their own desires. The language of the pirates is normatively “objectionable” because through obscenity they implode conventional constructions of gender and “feminine” codes of behaviour.

Power structures of discourses and meaning are imploded by the prostitutes’ reappropriation of the language that seeks to define their “being,” their “essence.” The brothel becomes a space of enunciation that is marked by a multiplicity of “gestures and cries” (Acker 11). The revaluation of meaning and how one “knows” through the construction of hegemonic interpretations is an important project that deconstructs the monolithic “woman” in its celebration of the plurality of experience:

If woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this ‘within’, to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. (Cixous, Medusa 229)

Space and time within Pussy are reordered and reinscribed from within the culture of the prostitutes. The coding of the brothel and the prostitute’s body in terms of regulatory fictions of the “natural” and the “unnatural” is disrupted by the prostitutes’ appropriation of the power of language. Language, as theorized by both Cixous and Acker, requires a displacement from the stable structures of meaning and history which contain it and make it “knowable.” Once the order of language is disrupted, the determinism that locates bodies within a set of abstracted “absolutes” can also be deconstructed.

The language of interruption and perversity that Acker’s texts celebrate can be theorized in terms of the space of the abject. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Julia

Kristeva examines the construction of the "state of abjection," and its implications in terms of institutionalized structures of meaning and identity. Significantly, Kristeva notes, in terms of literature of the abject, that

When narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first. If it continues nevertheless, its makeup changes; its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles, and cuts. At a later stage, the unbearable identity of the narrator and of the surroundings that are supposed to sustain him can no longer be *narrated* but *cries out* in *descried* with maximal stylistic intensity (language of violence, of obscenity, or of a rhetoric that relates the text to poetry). The narrative yields to a *crying-out theme* that, when it tends to coincide with the incandescent states of a boundary-subjectivity that I have called abjection, is the crying-out theme of suffering-horror. (141)

The ability of the language of the abject to violate narrative boundaries is an extension of the abject body's violence against the organizing structure of the "human." The abject's posthumanity is indicated by its social exile to the "borders of the body" (71), particularly, to the "excremental and menstrual" (71). The abject body, like the posthuman body, challenges "the coherence of the 'human body' as a figure through which culture is processed and oriented" (Halberstam and Livingston vii). These bodies expose the constructedness of both a gendered, heterosexualized, "human" body, as well as the categorizations of "subject" and "object" that locate this identified human body within a series of socio-cultural relations.

The destructive/deconstructing impulses of the abject body dismember notions of the representing and discriminating "I/eye." The abject is " [a]n 'I' overcome by the corpse. . . For it is death that most violently represents the strange state in which a non-subject, a stray, having lost its non-objects, imagines nothingness through the ordeal of abjection"

(Kristeva 25). Indeterminacy of location and identity mark out the abject body's flows and displacements of the social order. Abject bodies remove themselves from the economies (political/sexual, etc.) that "fix" bodies within the socius:

Finally free of Johns, the whores, now alone, spewed out bits of ink, words in ink, sexual or filthy words, words that were formed by the scars and wounds, especially those of sexual abuse, those out of childhood. All the women bore their wounds as childhoods. Therefore, words apocalyptic and apostrophic, punctuations only as disjunctions, disjunctions or cuts into the different parts of the body of the world, everything priced and priced until, finally, all the numbers disappeared and were displaced by the winds:

Ventre, vente, vent. (Acker 36)

The complex dynamic that binds the prostitute to the john is disabled by the prostitutes' revolution. The "whores" remove themselves from the symbolic order that is defined by the "presence" of the Johns. The "whores," as abject bodies, reconstitute themselves in terms of a language of subversion — an excremental language marked by "sex" and "filth." Language operates, here, to dislocate stable categories of meaning. Words replace the sexual economy between "whore" and "john," becoming a masturbatory, solitary pleasure that reconnects the prostitute's body to that anarchic "sense" of *jouissance*.

The commodification of the "female" body that is organized in and around the sexual territory of that imaginary "feminine" is deterritorialized by the nomadic flows of unrestrained sexuality — the "winds," in their translated, transformative, linguistic state. The relationship between language as a regulatory structure and the socialization of sexuality and gender is addressed by Shari Benstock in Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre. As Benstock points out:

both psychoanalysis and grammatology acknowledge phallogocentrism. . . as the primary signifying structure of Western culture. Within this mode of signification,

which privileges the visual and the phallic, a supposedly rational/masculine logic constructs its 'sense' against irrational/feminine 'nonsense'. Founded on sexual difference that fears phallic loss (that is, fears the powerlessness of feminization), the signifying system sets itself up as a 'universal,' masculine order that denies (but also represents) sexual difference. The feminine provides the repressed ground of the system, which elaborates its logic of denied loss *through* the feminine. (Nonsense must be 'lost' so that sense can properly function.) The feminine is therefore the site of disorder that the system must posit and repudiate in order to achieve its (illusion of) coherence. Threatening to disrupt the system's fictive coherence, the feminine also represents what the system must repress and invoke in order to stabilize its functions. (6)

Phallogocentrism, the structuring of which seeks to control the gendered body, defers "female" subjectivity and agency through its socio-cultural operations. The whores' revolt against masculine ordering systems is a revolt against the "female" body's abstraction into systems of exchange (sexual, political, economic, etc.) The prostitutes reclaim the language of "nonsense," that alternate language of the overcoding of meaning, in order to evade such systemizations of identity as exchange value, gender, racial difference, and sexuality. In other words, the prostitutes remove themselves from a series of representational strategies that position the "female" body as "other."

The prostitutes in Pussy offer an interrogation of the gendered construction of "human" experience. The division of "human" experience into the categories of "male" and "female" neglects the possibilities for a liberating sexual polymorphism that subverts normalizing societal structures through its blurring of conventional gender categories. The "winds" that transmit the prostitutes' desires become the medium through which the "human" is transformed into the "posthuman." The "human" which institutionalizes normative social behaviours constructs notions of "perversion" and "deviance" (seen on one level in Pussy in the transgressive nature of the prostitute's body) in order to fortify itself against the

divergent claims and tactics of the body/bodies that blur the categories which define and situate knowledges of the “human.” Gender, in terms of its socio-cultural implications, is one way by which the “human” is organized. The codifying practices of gender and sexuality become one way that the “human” regulates and normalizes the body within the *socius*. The body, thus *made* obedient and passive, reproduces and maintains repressive socio-cultural strategies.

The idea of “spaces of exile” that are constructed throughout the text of *Pussy* works performatively to express an aestheticization of gendered experiences of both space and time. For O in *Pussy* the geography that surrounds the brothel is itself an encryption, a language that she is unable to manipulate. It is only within the space of the brothel that O is *actualized*. The streets that lie outside are the indicators of her *virtual* potentiality, where, in their fantastic indeterminacy, and deferred signification, O can *mean* anything:

It didn't matter, the name of this unknown city to which I came. All the unknown cities, in China, held slums that looked exactly like each other: each one a labyrinth, a dream, in which streets wound into streets which disappeared in more streets and every street went nowhere. For every sign had disappeared. (Acker 7)

Thus the landscape of O's fantasy articulates an aesthetic that suspends both space and time and the orders of meaning that organize bodies historically and socio-culturally. The intense dissolution of self that is initiated by O's apprehension of the infinite possibilities of her body within the dreamscape of endless streets is, however, mediated and limited by her containment within the structure of heterosexuality that has “placed” her within the brothel. When O's boyfriend W brings her to the brothel, it is only to abandon her — another non-“sign,” or meaningless gesture that points to the same kind of aesthetic of disappearance that

the streets speak to for O.

In The Possessed Individual: Technology and the French Postmodern, Arthur Kroker explores the fragmentation of subjectivity within the postmodern spaces of culture. Kroker theorizes the recoding of dismembered subjectivities within the context of the “virtual,” where “new” languages and “new” identities/selves circulate according to nomadic sensibilities. Using Nietzsche’s conception of “perspectival appearance,” Kroker suggests that the hyper-aestheticization of experience produces a state of “possessed individualism” in which:

subjectivity [is brought] to a point of aesthetic excess [so] that the self no longer has any real existence, only a perspectival appearance as a site where all the referents converge and implode. Subjectivity, therefore, which is created out of the ruins of abuse value, a designer self which emerges from the cancellation of all the signs. An *apparent* self whose memories can be fantastic reveries of a past which never really existed, because it occupies a purely virtual space — the space of an accidental topology and seductive contiguity of aesthetic effects. No longer a private subject in a public space, but a public self in a private imaginary time: a parallel self among many others drifting aimlessly, but no less violently for that, in parallel worlds. (5)

The body of “Woman” within history, mythology, and language, is always already a simulacrum. The whores in Acker’s text Pussy actively engage in a reconstruction of identity as *virtual possibility* against the totalizing construction of “Woman” under a phallogocentric order: “The feminist subject, then, [can be theorized as] an event-scene, living at the edge of the material body and virtual reality. Neither really pure corporeal denotation or perfect virtuality or desire; but both simultaneously” (Kroker 119).

The doubled, multiplied bodies of Acker’s text Pussy enact this flux between the material and the virtual that Kroker traces. The body of the whore as it “exists” within a normative,

socio-cultural organization of signification is an empty/emptied sign. It is "empty" in the sense that it is constructed from "without," as a signal/marker of transgression. The posthuman body of the prostitute that is transformed into "pure" language, and that is dispersed by the "winds," *becomes* space:

No longer a material entity, the postmodern body becomes an infinitely permeable and spatialized field whose boundaries are freely pierced by subatomic particles in the microphysics of power. Once the veil of modernity/subjectivity has been transgressed (and abandoned), then the body as something real vanishes into the spectre of hyperrealism. Now, it is the postmodern body as space, linked together by force fields and capable of being represented finally only as a fractal entity. The postmodern self, then, as a fractal subject — a minute temporal ordering midst the chaotic entropy of a contemporary culture which is winding down, but moving all the while at greater and greater speeds. (Kroker and Cook v)

The postmodern, spatialized, body is capable of sliding freely across and through temporal boundaries — it plays with "history" in order to dissolve the representational politics that construct categories of identity. The "dream maps" that *infiltrate* the text of Pussy chart the spatialization of desire across the gendered body. The movement of desire across and through bodies is the desire to displace the body's "fixedness" within normative conceptualizations of time and space. In this sense, the postmodern body *becomes* a quantum body, that "fractal" subject that Kroker and Cook theorize.

The virtualization of the material body within the text of Pussy is an effect of the body's historicization. Pussy does not announce "the end of history," but instead asserts a disassemblage of the organizing mechanisms of history. Memory, within the narrative of Acker's text, is necessarily selective and always random. Space and time are fluctuating and unstable boundaries through which the posthuman self "performs" important acts of "forgetting" in order to transform and reconstitute itself as a dynamic process:

Hegel, or the panopticon, sees all, except for the beginning of the world. In that beginning, which is still beginning, there is a young girl. Her name's not important. She's been called King Pussy, Pussycat, Ostracism, O, Ange. Once she was called Antigone. . . (Acker 163)

History, and thus identity, are “untimely:” “Spread out over a topographical field, the imploded self is energized creating the movement over a power grid where *all* ontologies are merely the sites of local ‘catastrophes’” (Kroker and Cook 26). The displacement of the masterful eye (Hegel) which surveys and *marks* all of “history” and “being,” articulates Kroker and Cook’s critique of technologies of power. The construction of a parallel, subjugated realm of chaotic identities and interchangeable, permeable, histories in Acker’s texts reflect what Kroker and Cook theorize as a “discourse on the disembodied eye of the dead power at the centre of Western experience. . .” (28). To “be,” in terms of Acker’s text, is to be contained by and within the masculinist gaze that seeks self-authentication through the construction of the “other.” Knowing oneself, for the “others” of Acker’s text, *is* that site of “catastrophe” that Kroker and Cook posit. The “young girl” of Pussy’s ruptured time line is promiscuous in her very multiplicity and indeterminacy — in her textualization.

The stable, idealized orders of “meaning” which direct Hegel’s construction of “history” are fragmented/ “fractalized” by the exiled pirate bodies of Pussy. The conceptualization of a “fractal” history has important implications for socio-culturally entrenched figurations of gender and identity. The deferral of identity in the flow of “names” that represent the “fictional” lineage of the “other” charts the discontinuities of history that are otherwise subordinated to hegemonic orderings of knowledge. The bodies that Pussy re-calls parody those categories of identity that are legitimated and *made* “real” through the discourse(s) of

history. As Paula Rabinowitz notes:

Eliminating the distinction between action and articulation, deed and word, the posthuman body is still saturated with the stories of humanity that circulate around it; it speaks through a language straddling the borders between health/sickness, male/female, real/imaginary. It tells its stories, however, through those already told; it rips off the past to refuse the future. ("Soft Fictions" 98)

The categories that regulate meaning are displaced by Pussy's pirate bodies which move fluidly across time and space to carve out alternative "truths" which are explicitly "fictional": "*She's been called King Pussy, Pussycat, Ostracism, O, Ange. Once she was called Antigone . . .*" (Acker 163). The very constructedness of "reality," of what is designated as "real," is what Pussy examines. The critique of "authenticity" that Acker's text launches against the orthodoxy of culturally produced institutions which function to control discourses of knowledge performs itself as a text of posthumanity. The text of Pussy is thus aligned with Rabinowitz's suggestion that "[p]erhaps a posthuman feminism develops from the evasion of truth — from fantasy, exaggeration and lies" (98). The elements of "fantasy, exaggeration and lies" operate to reveal the *performativity* of identity, not as a category or categories which are positioned in opposition to "reality" and "truth," for these "absolutes" are revealed *through* fantasy to be always already illusory.

Identity, as shown through posthuman critiques, is contingent. Identity *becomes* "an imaginative reconstruction, a symbolic performance. . . of desire" (102), always deferred, always constructed, and, in the end, always unseen. For Acker's "protagonists" there is no absolute recourse back to that imaginary, "originary" primal scene because history is conceived of as a dynamic process. History is conceptualized as a constantly shifting present that, in itself, is nonlinear but is always in danger of recuperation, always coded from

without by the ordering systems of history, gender, race, and class: "...the punk boys told us what it is to be a pirate. We joined up with them. It was only now that we were able to make up the rules of piracy" (Acker 204). The "punk boys," who in Pussy are worshipers of Antonin Artaud, impose, ironically, meaning and order upon the anarchy of the pirate girls. Here, even the margins of sociality (represented in "punk" as a subcultural organization) invoke notions of value and structure — the principles of reason — to homogenize and contain the excesses of the pirate girls. Within the socius, as Pussy points out, there is no privileged site of transgression to which to escape. The only "lines of flight" that can be usefully drawn are those that suspend all categories of the "real," those that question all strategies of identification and representation.

The issue that remains, both for Pussy. King of the Pirates, and for this interrogation, is: what "kind" of body/bodies does an encounter between feminism and postmodernism produce? If Kathy Acker's texts are used as an articulation of the emergence of a feminist postmodern politics then the notion of the posthuman asserts itself as a significant theoretical space within which feminism's "anxiety" can be examined. The abjected, virtualized body of the posthuman disposes of the human's "categorical imperative" towards social normativity in order to reflexively question "itself" as a gendered, racialized, sexualized — identified — body. The posthuman body that consequently circulates itself is violent and taboo *because* of its performativity and its heterogeneity — its construction and deconstruction of itself in terms of multiplicities. The posthuman body *becomes* a site of increasing indeterminacy. As Scott Bukatman asserts:

So far, the body has remained largely protected, a boundary that might be

transgressed, but a boundary and limit point nevertheless. Yet, within these discourses, the body is hardly inviolate — it is instead a site of almost endless dissolution. From here the language of terminal identity becomes increasingly de-forming of the human, as the subject is simulated, morphed, modified, re-tooled, genetically engineered, and even dissolved. (244)

The subject/object position of the posthuman subverts the establishment of fixed identities upon the body; it is, itself, a contested proposition. The posthuman body is, above all, a meta-body that comments upon itself, that theorizes itself, and, in the “end,” perhaps refuses itself. The posthuman is not a position that offers solace, but rather induces discomfort within the narratives which seek to gain mastery over, to define, and to “know,” bodies and minds, and to position them in a kind of philosophical or rhetorical combat against each other. What is feminism then in terms of the posthuman? In the words of Maggie Estep, “she’s” “an angry sweaty girl” (21).

**Chapter Three—The Fragmented Body: Subjectivity and Body Discourse in *Don Quixote*
which was a dream**

It's my body
It's not Pepsi's body
It's not Nancy Reagan's body
It's not Congress's body
It's not the Supreme Court's body
It's not Cosmopolitan's body
It's not George Bush's ugly-conscience, never-be-
responsible, let-the-world-rot body
It's not Cardinal O'Connor's Catholic church-
homophobic-hate women-hate queers-oppressive-
DEVIL-SATAN-no children body
IT'S NOT YOUR BODY (Finley 113)

Theorizing the body as a cultural text is a project that must concern itself with the social processes that encode the body and that inform dominant perceptions of the body, or, “our” body awareness. To decenter hegemonic conceptualizations of the body is to put into question the stability of the posited human subject who understands her or himself as a “subject” in relation to how their body “experiences” their external, as well as their internal, psycho-emotional environments. The “body,” as an operative of discourses of knowledge, *becomes* a text that is read in order to determine “subject-hood”: i.e., humanity, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other categorizations that locate one specifically within a cultural context of power and knowledge. In our ostensibly posthuman era, which is both dominated and fascinated by the narratives of biotechnology, increasingly, the body as text becomes a map of bodily anxiety. Why is the notion of the loss of subjectivity or the deconstruction of bodily knowledges so disturbing to so many theorists? And why has the notion of subjectivity become a universal given, a “human” quality as it were:

The hysteria around physical fitness, civil liberties, AIDS treatment, the right to life,

the right to death, eating disorders, the war on drugs, surveillance in the workplace, steroids in pro sports, and the sexual exploits of public figures are all symptoms of this hyper-rhetorized body, as though its presence *in discourse* will somehow guarantee its continued relevance *in the world*. (Bukatman 245)

It is here that the logic of the Logos is enforced. It is here that it is appropriate to speak of the body in terms of its textuality, and to consider the hybrid or cyborg body as a “real” body state which locates the body within a set of relations that are both material and textual simultaneously.

Acker’s works operate as cyborg narratives, confronting their own textuality as well as the textualization of the subject position within canonical discourses of knowledge. In Don Quixote: which was a dream, Acker’s protagonist explores the elision between the text and the “subject,” an elision that constructs an imaginary unity under the guise of one woman’s, Don Quixote’s, archetypal quest to find and understand the nature of human, heterosexual love. Don Quixote demystifies and revolts against canonicity by deconstructing the “literary,” the “gendered” body that inhabits discourses of heterosexual love:

‘Why can’t I just love?

‘Because every verb to be realized needs its object. Otherwise, having nothing to see, it can’t see itself or be. Since love is sympathy or communication, I need an object which is both subject and object: to love, I must love a soul. Can a soul exist without a body? Is physical separate from mental? Just as love’s object is the appearance of love; so the physical realm is the appearance of the godly: the mind is the body. This, she thought, ‘is why I’ve got a body. This’s why I’m having an abortion. So I can love.’ This’s how Don Quixote decided to save the world. (Acker 10)

The very specialized grammar of love that Don Quixote invokes, parodies the literary convention of courtly love, as well as the relationship that traditionally positions the subject/reader against, in confrontation with, the object/text. Both conventions are governed

by a stable set of rules and regulations that determine a specific code of behaviour for interaction, and both involve a complex process of reification. The deportment of love determined by the aristocratic literature of “courtliness” is marked by the theme of suffering, a coding of the lover’s body that Acker’s Don Quixote identifies in her abortion. The abortion is a significant element in Don Quixote’s quest for love, in effect eroticizing her quest in its distancing of the concept of heterosexual love from any kind of procreative imperative: “Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children” (Bataille 11). Don Quixote removes herself from the realm of the “natural” in order to become the *night errant* of erotic love. Her body is literally transformed into a possibility that is contingent upon her ability to trace and gain access to representations of love. The body must suffer in order to possess the ideals of love: “the mind is the body” (Acker 10).

The Courtly Body: Deconstructing the canon of love

A woman is just like melting wax, which is always ready to take a new form and to receive the impress of anybody’s seal. (Capellanus 204)

Don Quixote’s ironic quest for the idea of love parodies the ethico-aesthetic ideals of knighthood. *She*, importantly, realizes that her body, in particular, her gendered female body, must be transformed in order for her to fulfil the requirements of her quest. Here, it is not enough to impersonate masculinity, she must *become* the illusory, unified whole in order to both understand and know the mysteries of love. The heterosexualization of love in effect contextualizes Don Quixote’s quest—how men and women “love” each other becomes the *point* of her adventures and manipulations through discourse and ideology. The

construction and regulation of love and bodies that love in turn determine the formulation of a politics of gendered identity that Don Quixote deconstructs:

When she was finally crazy because she was about to have an abortion, she conceived of the most insane idea that any woman can think of. Which is to love. How can a woman love? By loving someone other than herself. She would love another person. By loving another person, she would right every manner of political, social, and individual wrong: she would put herself in those situations so perilous the glory of her name would resound. (Acker 9)

Love, here, becomes connected with several important factors that will become consistent themes in Don Quixote's quest: 1) the abortion; 2) delusion associated both with the abortion and the condition of "being" female; 3) the nature of a woman's ability to love; 4) selfhood and the deconstruction of culturally ordered subjectivities; and 5) identity. The conception of the quest for love is initiated by the invasion of her body by authorities in order to terminate the product of sexual love—read "heterosexual" love. The abortion (ostensibly an "ending") and the formation of Don Quixote's quest (ostensibly a "beginning") are brought together. The idea that there are opposed beginnings and endings is dismantled, in the process, the archetypal structure of "the quest is reconstructed," as well as the themes that Don Quixote associates with her quest for love.

In a sense, Don Quixote's transformation enacts Deleuze and Guattari's process of "becoming-woman," in other words, becoming a multiplicity of partial identities and selves that ultimately comprise the "proliferating histories of the feminine" (Griggers xi). As Camilla Griggers suggests:

If we admit that social bodies exist only in a process of constant historical transformation, then there are only hybrid bodies, moving bodies, migrant bodies, becoming bodies, machinic-assemblage bodies. And in relation to bodies of signs in post-industrial capitalism, even in the case of the most organ-ized signifying regimes,

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) insist there are only *transsemiotics*. It's futile then to ask what subjectivities *essentially* exist inside and alongside the transversed social bodies of postmodernity. (54)

Don Quixote's transgressively fluid and unstable bodily identity deconstructs the "stable" signifying systems to which Griggers refers. Don Quixote's body, through its socializations (its medicalization, its sexualization, etc.) *becomes* a coded text upon which the representational practices of normativity can be read. The implied passivity of the body as a text to be read and inscribed from without is an integral part of the hybrid body. Its passivity within the socius does not preclude the multiplicity of subversive tactics and practices that the body enacts in order to evade the forces of normalization that are imposed upon it. The body is simultaneously an ordered and disordered (organ-ized and dis-organ-ized) space, as Don Quixote's transformative body suggests.

What is established at the outset of Don Quixote is the non-innocence of the body. When Don Quixote invokes the quest in relation to her impending abortion, she is deconstructing the mythology that has created the questing body as well as the position of female-ness within the "history" of love. For Don Quixote, gender, sexuality, and the bodies that are defined by these categorizations, occupy a space of momentariness, a crisis of representation wherein the body and its constituent, identifying factors are shown to be unstable, permeable and constantly intersecting. Thus, it becomes unclear *who* the "subject" of her quest is—identity is always already a discursive construction:

She decided that since she was setting out on the greatest adventure any person can take, that of the Holy Grail, she ought to have a name (identity). She had to name herself. When a doctor sticks a steel catheter into you while you're lying on your back and you do exactly what he and the nurses tell you to; finally, blessedly, you let go of your mind. Letting go of your mind is dying. She needed

a new life. She had to be named. (9-10)

The quest for the “Holy Grail” embodies the paradigm of “the quest” archetype that informs Don Quixote’s search for love. The elements that comprise the form and function of the quest become interchangeable and part of an examination of the construction of subjectivity: “a spiritual goal representing inner wholeness, union with the divine, self-fulfilment” (Matthews 5). That these properties become connected to the function of naming, or the construction of an identity, is significant. Don Quixote must locate herself within the quest construct as either the subject or object of the quest—the hero or the sacralized object—in order to exploit both the literary convention of the quest and the Adamic qualities, specifically, the power of naming, ascribed to authors of texts. As Don Quixote’s self-mythologizing suggests, she is in the process of re-writing her own body’s “history”/mythology.

Don Quixote’s re-naming is rhetorically linked to her abortion and the control of her body by external authorities — the doctors and nurses to which her body is *made* submissive. The passivity associated with both her mind and body necessitates the death of that body, that identity, which, through her abortion, becomes politically, socially, and religiously, inscribed. A new, potential, body is constructed as a process of self-invention. Her naming inserts control in the form of a posited “subjectivity” into her a quest, a self-presence that legitimates her “human” existence and place within a historicized narrative. The inter-relation of love and identity in the text of Don Quixote becomes an examination of the technologies of power that control and guide the construction of the gendered body. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

Every love is an exercise in depersonalization on a body without organs yet to be formed, and it is at the highest point of this depersonalization that someone can be *named*, receives his or her family name or first name, acquires the most intense discernibility in the instantaneous apprehension of the multiplicities belonging to him or her, and to which he or she belongs. (A Thousand Plateaus 35)

To be loved, to be named, is to be *seen*, to be incorporated into the normalizing socius. What subverts this process of social legitimation is the very multivalence and indeterminacy of the subject position itself. Who *is* the subject? Is it the anonymous patient, Hackneyed Catheter, Tolosa, or Don Quixote? The subject in flux redefines the nature of the quest and the relationship that exists between the gendered body and identity.

The quest for identity within the structure of love entails an analysis of the construction of gender differences and the ideology that underlies the heterosexual ideal of love. In order to exist, and to explore the territory of heterosexual love, Don Quixote must assume an identity that is indicative of a supposedly transcendent, and unified, god-head: “she would be able to become a female-male or a night-knight” (10). The “unity” of being, however, is available only by “taking on” a “name which, being long, is male” (10). Thus “Hackneyed Catheter” is “the glorification or change from non-existence into existence” (10) of the author, Kathy Acker. A quest, especially a quest for love, necessitates Don Quixote’s transformation into the quasi-heroic, primal androgyne of postmodern love — a love, however, that is predicated upon the social power of the male name.

The fiction of love that Don Quixote subverts is the convention that marks the “courtly” body, which upholds the feudal hierarchy which assigns subjectivity and agency to masculinity, and which abstracts “woman” into a set of idealized characteristics. The love that is the “object” of Don Quixote’s quest, the love that is marked by her abortion,

deconstructs the illusion of romantic love, an illusion that is undermined by its very language. The monolithic “Woman” is dismembered and parodied by Don Quixote’s reconstructions and her quest. “Her” identity, like “her” quest, is open ended, non-linear, without beginning or end. Don Quixote celebrates the creation and recreations of the female-male as “real” as the “female” or the “male” in their discursivity. “Her” body becomes a text upon which can be read a new historiography of “her” own making.

Don Quixote’s hybrid identity destabilizes both the categories of gender and of subjectivity. The new “female-male” body that Don Quixote constructs is unique because it is not *solely* determined by externally imposed structures of cultural meaning and interpretation. “Her” body is self-constructed, no longer passive, but actively interpreting and performing itself in response to the culture that confronts it. Don Quixote’s “new,” polymorphous, body interrogates the processes of socio-cultural inscription that seek to define and “place” bodies within essentializing identity configurations.

As Don Quixote’s transformation posits, “her” identity as “female” is eclipsed by the authority that is conferred upon the “natural” primacy of a masculinized subject. Don Quixote’s fragmented, schizophrenic, subjectivity critiques the presupposition that the “subject” is internally coherent, and that subjectivity is a universal “human” characteristic. As Don Quixote’s identity defies the unity and coherence that is conventionally attributed to the human subject, “she” is dismantling the apparatus of the heterosexual love relationship which assumes the distinction of gender as a defining attribute of its operations. Judith Butler, points out that

[a] political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the

substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for these acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (*Gender Trouble* 33)

Don Quixote's transgressive body is capable of articulating various discourses of the "feminine" that both construct and deconstruct bodily identities in Western culture. The categories of both "woman" and "women" are contested by Don Quixote's hybridity which manifests the constructed and arbitrary nature of gender ontologies. The question of claiming ownership of subjectivity becomes irrelevant when the historicity of "women's" bodies, sexuality, and desire, reveal their objectification. To *become* female-male disrupts the Cartesian dualism that separates the subject and the object into opposing, relational, terms.

To love, within the heterosexual paradigm, is to naturalize not only gender differences but to reinforce the subject and object positions. Don Quixote recognizes and questions the limitations of a heterosexual, proscriptive, love:

'Why can't I just love?

'Because every verb to be realized needs its object.

Otherwise having nothing to see, it can't see itself or be. (Acker 10)

"Being" is thus a deferred process. The subject must actualize itself through the object of its desire in order to legitimize its presence "in" the world. Don Quixote's soliloquy echoes Valéry's "Monsieur Teste" who, in his solitude, perceives the objectification of his sense of self as he sees himself seeing himself in an infinite *mise en abîme*: "The infinite reflexivity thus initiated liberates a series of visions, each of which reduces the preceding vision to the state of an object" (Starobinski 390). The material body is abandoned as the site of subjectivity in favour of the image, or the representation of the body, which makes the "self"

more “real” and apparent — the object *realizes* and authenticates the subject.

The problematics of representation that are exposed by Don Quixote’s questioning of the arbitrariness of both the subject and object positions brackets the “feminine” as occupying an objectified space within the structure of heterosexual love. The notion of there *being* a “female subject” within this discourse of love is an illusion. Female subjectivity is shown to be a reflection of a posited masculine subjectivity. The invocation of the “feminine” subject is revealed to be a purely theoretical formulation, an ideal that “reality,” or Don Quixote’s “reality,” does not bear out: “Hasn’t loving a man brought me to this abortion or state of death?” (Acker 10). Don Quixote’s response to her maligned body/identity is to transform it into a dream quest in which the suicided “self” performs a pivotal “role.”

Don Quixote’s quest for love is guided by her faithful companion, and one-time lover, “St. Simeon,” who has been transformed into a dog through “sorcery.” St. Simeon’s fateful disappearance leads Don Quixote to a cathedral in New York City. The uniting of St. Simeon and Don Quixote becomes part of Don Quixote’s exploration of the mythologies of “Love.” Here, St. Simeon recalls Simon Magus, the Gnostic prophet, while Don Quixote takes on the identity of the raised Helen, or the sacred harlot with whom St. Simon traveled. Just as Don Quixote’s quest for love will save the world, so was Helen, the raised “Thought of God,” through whom “humanity” was to be saved. Ironically, Helen, or Sophia, “fell” through self-will:

Abandoning the carefully balanced patterns of harmony and authority that had prevailed in the divine realm, Wisdom produces her own thought. But this thought, far from being a proper reflection of the Divine, comes forth grotesque and unformed, unlike its mother and unlike any of the other divine entities. (Williams 132)

Textually, it seems that Acker plays with this notion of the fallen "Thought." Don Quixote is "her" own creation coming forth outside of authority (Cervantes's text), just as St. Simeon is a deterritorialization of both Sancho Panza and Simon Magnus.

Don Quixote's characterization replicates the mythical paradigm of Wisdom in revolt against logic, reason, and author-ity: "...now that she had achieved knighthood, and thought and acted as she wanted and decided, for one has to act in this way in order to save this world, she neither noticed nor cared that all the people around her thought she was insane" (Acker 13). Don Quixote's self-creation, and her fall from normalized existence, implicates her newly formed "self" in the language of Sophia's rebellion. Her bastard creation *is* herself — "grotesque," "unformed," inauthentic, imperfect, and profane.

Don Quixote, in her attempt to both understand and obtain a purified essence of love, parodies the Kantian subject and its will towards the repression of individual desires in favour of the universalization of itself within a legislated, rational "nature." Heterosexual love is denaturalized as it is transformed into a discourse of suffering, and into an exposition on the construction of the female "subject" within history. St. Simeon, himself, bestialized (Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming-animal*), transformed into a wild dog, meditates on the nature of human suffering and its historiography:

'Traditionally, the human world has been divided into men and women. Women're the cause of human suffering. For women are so intelligent, they don't want anything to do with love. Men have tried to get rid of their suffering by altering this: first, by changing women; second, when this didn't work because women are stubborn creatures, by simply lying, by saying that women live only for men's love.

An alteration of language, rather than of material usually changes material conditions. . . (Acker 27)

Don Quixote's "subjectivity," already suspended, is shown to be a discursive experience that

dooms her quest. To *be* either the subject or object of love is to be in a provisional category. For her quest to “succeed” Don Quixote must accept a “material condition” that objectifies her self, a material condition that is already impossible for Don Quixote “*which was a dream.*” Don Quixote cannot reconstitute herself as a “subject” within the quest paradigm, indeed, within the paradigm of heterosexual love, without being normalized, and without accepting her insanity as problematic to her “being a “woman.” Here, it is the language that insists upon *who “Woman” is* that Don Quixote subverts. As Deleuze and Guattari point out: “Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 76). In her posited androgyny, Don Quixote is *both* subject and object, and *both* inside and outside¹ the discourses of gender that proscribe the rules for love, that demand that “she” exist “only for men’s love.”

Language, in terms of its regulation of Don Quixote’s quest, depoliticizes “the female body” by denying it agency. Language creates the material context within which Don Quixote discovers “herself.” The “dream” becomes her escape from the institutions which seek to identify and code her body as object, to deprive it of its agency: “I’m your desire’s object, dog, because I can’t be the subject. Because I can’t be a subject: What you name ‘love’, I name ‘nothingness’. I won’t not be: I’ll perceive and I’ll speak” (Acker 28). Agency is dislocated from the subject and the subjected body. The technology of language, used to discipline and manipulate the body, is turned against itself in a violent renunciation

¹ Teresa de Lauretis, in her text *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, has provided me with a “language” with which to discuss and critique gender formations. As de Lauretis asserts, “. . . women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation” (10).

of the subject and its will to mastery.

The “object” of love becomes eroticized in Don Quixote’s quest, as the subject is dismantled. The female gendered body within the discourses of love that Don Quixote negotiates is abstracted and idealized as the erotic object. She perceives that her condition as “female” does not allow her to participate in the very “love” that she is seeking: “ Finally Don Quixote understood her problem: she was both a woman therefore she couldn’t feel love and a knight in search of Love. She had had to become a knight, for she could solve this problem only by becoming partly male” (Acker 29). The representation of “woman” as erotic object in the discourse of romantic “Love” fixes Don Quixote’s material identity both inside and outside of the literary “universe.” Don Quixote, as “knight,” masquerades as a subject in a process that critiques the structures which produce and reinforce gender ontologies. Here, it is the literary construction of love that polices both bodies and their relationships with one another. “Woman” as a viable identity, as a locus of agency, is shown to be in constant deferral. The assertion of subjectivity by a “woman” is figured as a misrepresentation. Subjecthood, in terms of Acker’s political and linguistic critique, serves only to further entrench the gendered body in flows of power and in illusory representational discourses. The bodies that Acker parodies are socially determined; their seeming stability, however, is undermined by Don Quixote’s own transformative, *performative*, body. Don Quixote’s quest for love positions her on the fictional limits of identity and gender — ostensibly seeking to unsettle the metaphorical “center” from the “margins.”

The first section of Don Quixote “concludes” with Don Quixote’s descent into silence and normalization. The dissolution of her quest is preceded by her evaluation of

recorded/written history, and her identity as a “woman” within the construct of history. Identity becomes a matter of written identity: “the history of women must define female identity” (29). The word “embodies.” It creates bodies that are posited as real and authentic because they are products of an ostensibly authoritative discourse — the discourse of history:

‘Without personal history or memory,’ Don Quixote explained, ‘you wouldn’t know. Then everything would be possible. . .

‘It’s not history, which is actuality, but history’s opposite, death, which shows us that women are nothing and everything.’ Having found the answer to her problem, Don Quixote shut up for a moment. (30-31)

History is thus specularized. It illuminates, reveals, “sees,” “Woman,” while Don Quixote refuses to legitimize the power of history to temporally locate and “fix” her body. The “personal” becomes conflated with the “public,” a merger which stresses the fact that individual identity is contingent upon the social construction of identity. To “know” oneself becomes to know your history in its cultural context, a project that Don Quixote views as a limitation upon the inherent performativity of identity. Don Quixote’s individuation is perceived as an impossibility in that it is contingent; “she” can “be” and “know” only as a historical body. Regardless of whether a “woman” or a “man” has written that history, it informs “her” body in ways that “she” is uneasy with.

Don Quixote’s silence emphasizes her resistance, and underscores, ironically, the silence of “women’s” voices in histories of women that are recorded by men. By naming “death” as “women’s” space, Don Quixote situates the gendered body outside of representation, or at least, outside of a stable order of representation that is predicated upon an unchanging, universalizable set of identities and relations. What Don Quixote recognizes is the notion

of distortion, that the act of recording is not dependent upon a recognizable or apparent "truth" that is incontestable, that is "first hand." The metaphysics of presence that she uncovers in the "voice" of history is supplanted by the termination of her own voice — her refusal to occupy the same space as the "subjects" of history. At this point in Don Quixote's journey, her transgression — her silence — is individualized. The renunciation of "her voice" is a denial of the language that identifies and names her from both inside and outside her "self." Don Quixote's silence is ironic; in the same sense, its complicity with and subversion of historical discourse highlights the ambiguity of self-definition in any context.

Don Quixote's silence, as well, indicates that the search for a pure body, prior to discourse, is futile. The removal of herself from discourses that are limiting does not cleanse her body (make it innocent). The second part of Don Quixote details the effects of her silence and its implication for notions of self-hood, in particular, the parodic or subversive self which closely parallels Luce Irigaray's theory of *mimicry*:

BEING DEAD, DON QUIXOTE
COULD NO LONGER SPEAK.
BEING BORN INTO AND PART
OF A MALE WORLD, SHE HAD
NO SPEECH OF HER OWN. ALL
SHE COULD DO WAS READ
MALE TEXTS WHICH WEREN'T
HERS. (39)

Effectually, Don Quixote appears to normalize, to succumb to a categorical existence. Her seeming absorption into a patriarchally identified socius, however, is disrupted by the structure of the declaration which paradoxically asserts Don Quixote's individuation even as it erases her "voice." For Irigaray, this parodic act of mimicry is "an interim strategy for

dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her" (220). In a sense, the second part of Don Quixote details the continuation of her quest for love. The quest has not ended; Don Quixote's enslavement to a literary love is analyzed in this section of plagiarized texts as a psychoanalytic process, as part of her reconceptualization of notions of "self" and "agency" in a world defined in terms of "I" and "Other."

The declaration of the absence of Don Quixote that opens the second part of the text defines Don Quixote's deconstruction of romantic love and its process of othering. In the first line, Don Quixote is named, brought into existence against her erasure, her death. Her naming, out of the nothingness of her being, is important. It signals a second re-birth which repeats the chain of events that began her quest in her abortion or "self" suicide. Her "being" is located in a contradictory space that defines itself against any totalizing strategy, any notion of wholeness, of coherence. She is both "part" and "all" of the "male world," the "male texts which weren't," which operate to displace and dismember "hers." Her discourse (in third person) has a deliberately ambiguous speaking "subject," yet the last line of the declaration claims ownership of this discourse for Don Quixote; it is "hers." What then occurs in the following plagiarized texts is a questioning of author-ity, a deconstruction of discourses of love within which the "female subject" is positioned as "dead," with "no speech of her own." What if Lulu's text was "hers"?

Acker's retrieval of Lulu from Frank Wedekind's Lulu Plays is particularly significant to Don Quixote's exploration of the construction of identity within heterosexual love

paradigms. As Carl Richard Mueller posits:

Who is Lulu? What is she?
 Lulu is all things and something different to every man.
 She is fact, she is myth; she is corporeal, she is idea; she is realist, she is ideal.
 Lulu is the eternal-womanly that draws us downward. Not even her name is an ascertainable fact. ("Introduction: Wedekind and the Morality of the Flesh" 17)

If, at least in terms of Wedekind's construction of Lulu, "woman" is "nothing and all; she is being without mind, without thought, without conscience: she is not merely demonic, she is demon personified" (17), then Acker's Lulu exploits and "vandalizes" her constructions — her "selves" — in order to expose their inherent "createdness." The performativity of these constructed selves enables the posthuman body to escape the bounds of the text. The regime of signs that construct and discipline Lulu within Wedekind's texts is disrupted by Acker's incursion into its signifying practices.

Lulu, as the feminine-predatory subject who kills her third husband Schoen in cold blood, is reformulated *through* Don Quixote's interrogation into the normalizing strategies of the socius. In Don Quixote, Lulu retrieves herself from the closed representation that Wedekind's play Earth Spirit suggests:

SCHWARZ: Eve??
 SCHOEN: I called her Mignon.
 SCHWARZ: I thought her name was Nelly.
 SCHOEN: That's what Doctor Goll called her.
 SCHWARZ: And I called her Eve...
 SCHOEN: What her real name was, I'm afraid I don't know.
 SCHWARZ (*absently*): Perhaps *she* knows. (Wedekind 62)

What is apparent, at least in terms of Wedekind's Lulu plays, is that Lulu is peripheral to all ordered systems of knowing, to all organized structures of "human" sociality and normativity. As Lulu herself, in Earth Spirit repetitively claims: "I can't answer you," "I

don't know" (50).

Lulu's story appropriates the politics of language and power found in texts which seek to essentialize and totalize gender and sexuality. Romantic love, here, is a construction that locates the feminine in void and absence, outside of agency and subjectivity. Lulu confronts this negation of self by inserting her own "voice" as gloss to the masculinist text:

Lulu, directly to Schön: Don't you realize what this lack of love is? I'm not denying that you picked me up from nothing and made me. But if you do not love what and who you have made, for all is living, what you have made is polluted and an abortion. I am polluted and an abortion. (Acker 83)

Lulu is the concretization of Schön's desire, and his transgression made apparent and material. What is ironic about the "creator" is that he does not recognize Lulu when she speaks in the language that he has taught her, making her voice anti-social: "Lulu. . . I have nothing more to say to you because you will not be worth speaking to until you learn to be a person and to act in manners acceptable to this society" (83). Like Don Quixote, Lulu must learn not to speak in order to "fit" into "male texts." Lulu's language infiltrates and disorganizes Schön's space within the text of Wedekind's Lulu plays, Earth Spirit, Pandora's Box, and Death and the Devil through the medium of Acker's text Don Quixote.

Lulu's exile from Schön's sight and language is, perhaps paradoxically, a reclamation of her "self" outside of his text and his processes of inscription: "(Lulu looks around her and no longer bothers to speak to anyone because IT ISN'T WORTH COMMUNICATING ANYMORE" (83). Lulu's actions here are supplementary. In the Derridean sense, she, at this point, is exterior to the main action (Schön's command). Lulu is parenthetical, a stage direction. Her silencing, however, is instrumental to her critique of Schön's language — his

inability to communicate, his misuse of what Lulu considers language's dominant "function." Schön's dialogue encodes Lulu as other, infantile and outside of language's capacity to produce meaning.

Lulu's silence is self-imposed because her voice is no longer capable of identifying her "self" in relation to the exterior world. Rather, her voice alienates her "self" from a world that is defined by Schön's words, words which reduce her "being" to the level of a commodity-object: "The domains of political and linguistic 'representation' set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject" (Butler, Gender Trouble 1). As Schön's creation, Lulu is a "thing," formed from without, outside of subjecthood, just as Don Quixote's identity derives from the conventions of courtly literature. What is important to note, however, is that the denial of subjectivity does not presuppose, necessarily, a lack of agency, at least in some sense. The political construction and regulation of the "subject" as a masculinist, totalizing, project can not preclude the attribution of agency or active performativity to an imposed, or voluntary, object position.

Lulu's constructed status operates as a meta-fictional tactic which problematizes canonicity and the identities that are generated through the canon to which it refers — from classical mythology, to Shaw, to Wedekind: "Meaning is generated by the play of representation within this empire of self-reflecting order, taxonomies, and hypotheses about being. . ." (Thiher 113). Lulu's identity is not only predicated upon her intertextuality, but on the assumptions that these texts produce and reproduce, engaging her, at the same time that they disengage her, from their representational strategies. Her silence, as subversion,

is complicated by the issues of “femininity” as a construct that, as well, inform and locate “woman” in the realm of the voiceless. What undercuts Lulu’s, and by extension Don Quixote’s, speechlessness is that the reader is allowed access to her thoughts, and consequently, made cognizant of her agency and “being.”

The reconstituted self of Don Quixote, realized through the linguistic and geographical exile of Lulu — her retreat to her bedroom (a room of one’s own?), is not the patriarchal, “clean” self, but that of an abjected self that places her on the limits of sociality: “I am polluted and an abortion” (Acker 83). Don Quixote “speaks” through the “stolen” and transformed story of Lulu in order to emphasize the inherent discursivity of gendered experience. Both Lulu and Don Quixote utilize the object position as a site from which to critique and subvert the essentializing determinism of a socio-culturally privileged subjecthood.

The multiple selves that negotiate the discourses of love found in the text of Don Quixote are ironic, as is the quest itself. This irony, however, is manifested textually, and made apparent visually, to the reader in asides, epigraphs, and stage directions. If, as Hutcheon suggests in Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony, irony is “the mode of the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen” (9), then Acker exteriorizes the ironic process. Don Quixote, Lulu, and Villebranche *are* the unsaid, the unheard, and the unseen, but they subvert this textual strategy, and the implications that it holds for representations of the “feminine” within both literary and socio-cultural practices, by revealing their motivations for, and complicity with, their silencing.

The subversion of voice and the “I/eye” in Don Quixote involves the idea of the “love

quest" in a battle against itself. What is "love" without the lover's declarations (voice), without the lover's gaze which ostensibly expresses her/his "love?" The politics of "love," as a function of the voice and the gaze, are examined in the third "part" of Don Quixote, through an analysis of "oedipus," and "women's" relationships to the mythological. This third, and "final" section, subtitled "The End of the Night," deconstructs the symbolic Father and unravels the literary production of love and its ties to systems of power that regulate language and sexuality:

Don Quixote: 'He whom I love is my eyes and heart and I'm sick when I'm not with him, but he doesn't love me. He's my eyes; he's my I's; I see by my I's; he's my sun. My son lets me see and be. Thus he's my and the A . I've said it in every book, mainly porn or poor books, I've ever written A d nauseam even in nauseam, for love hurts badly. I'll say it again: without I's, the I is nothing. Or without feeling the body's dead. (Acker 101)

Here, Acker deconstructs subjectivity and the gendered "subject's" ontological desire. The posited female "subject" is deterritorialized. "Her" desire to "be" necessarily involves her construction, her "subjectification" by the masculinized and phallicized "I/eye." Don Quixote's sense of "self" is multiple. She exists within the boundary that separates subject and object, as well as merging identities with the author, Kathy Acker, herself. This play with fictionalities emphasizes the textual inscription of self that calls the "subject" into existence. The author looks into her own text(s), and in that moment perceives the fragmented self that is both subversive of and complicitous with the cultural mechanisms that encode her within society. The primacy of the subject position within Western philosophical thought is parodied with the invocation of the anarchic self. At the same time, the author's intervention into the text stresses the circularity of "woman's" relationship to

the systems that construct her. She is both a product *of*, and self-produced. The instability of this position is manifested by Don Quixote's love "sickness," and Acker's writing "sickness": "A d nauseam, even in nauseam" (101).

Don Quixote's "subjectivity" is constituted through her involvement in phallogentric ordering systems, here, exemplified in power discourses of heterosexual "love" relationships. Through Acker's parody of these discourses, Don Quixote's "subjectivity" is unraveled at the precise moment that it is instituted, in terms of the disassociation of the "female" subject/object from the processes that construct individuation — the "I/eye." Don Quixote's "being" is textual, a process of writing herself into existence which opposes the primacy of the "I" which is visually identified and located within space and time. Don Quixote's mythical dream world disrupts not only the construction of "subjectivity (here as the imposition of "order" on the mirrored, and chaotic, "other"), but, as well, the structuring of the location of the subject through the indeterminacy of the mythic.

Don Quixote, within the paradigm of the love quest, is a function of the gaze. She does not see herself "being," she is *seen*, constituted as a "subject" of representation from without. This process of subjectification is underscored by her inherent fictionality. We, as readers, construct her identity in collusion with both the author of the text and with "he whom I love." Thus, Don Quixote's quest circles back around to meet itself at its ostensible "starting" point — her desire for identity within the socius is aborted, and shown to be a quest for the illusory, the elusive: "Endless whole I am an endless hole I can't bear this. I have put myself in exile so I can't be face-to-face with this which is my loneliness" (158). Don Quixote's location of her self in a position of lack or absence, her exile from "here,"

the socius, to “there,” always deferred, enacts Lacan’s formulation of the “forced choice” which Mladan Dolar analyzes in “At First Sight”:

The formal aspect of this model may serve as a pattern of subjectivation: one is presented with a choice that is decided in advance, and by choosing, one suffers a loss. To put it roughly, the subject, in its insertion in the social, is subject of a choice, but a forced one, and of a loss. The example is also designed to demonstrate the price one has to pay for the entry into the symbolic. . . . Love, in its many various forms, has this mechanism of forced choice always attached to it. To put it simply, one is compelled to choose love and thereby give up the freedom of choice, while by choosing the freedom of choice, one loses both. (130)

What is perhaps most interesting about Don Quixote’s renunciation of the system that seeks to enfold her into the social is her rejection of and by love. Her exile epitomizes her flight from the normalizing impulses of a culture that “forces” the choice of love, that forcibly divides the “visible,” and thereby “knowable,” universe into subjects and objects.

Don Quixote’s exile, however, is not a self-imposed alienation, a reclaiming of “choice” and self-construction. Such a reclamation of “place” would too neatly situate Don Quixote within the narrative of the feminist “subject” coming to “voice,” and cast aside, in the process, the patriarchal symbolic order in favour of the marginalized, or “feminine,” wilderness space of the exile. Instead, Don Quixote’s re-location positions herself in “lack,” the unsaid, the gloss that is *both* simultaneously the constructed and the constructing. In essence, Don Quixote’s entrance into theoretical “nothingness,” a posited, hypothetical, black hole, removes her from the power of the lover’s gaze. However, even in exile Don Quixote occupies a space which is not “pure” absence. It is a placement of the “self” that articulates, in a sense, that transgressive sexuality results in shame and punishment. With her exile, Don Quixote recalls the historicity of “women’s” bodies, sexualities, and desires

in Western culture. Her removal from the symbolic order is her refusal to normalize, but nevertheless she remains a subject/object of political and linguistic representations.

Don Quixote's apperception of self, her "face-to-face," is that of "loneliness," an abstraction, or more precisely an evocation of the loss of embodiment, potentially, and the absence of subjectivity — there is no "other" self, in her confrontation with her "mirror," that allows for the constitution of subjectivity: "...it is only by virtue of one's mirror reflection that one can become endowed with an ego, establish oneself as an 'I'" (137). Don Quixote becomes the "nonspecular," in terms of Lacanian theory, the "object *a*," that is, loss, the unseen. She acknowledges, in turn, her own paradoxical situation: "You have only what you're given or are: yourself. There's no escape: not even exile's escape" (Acker 148). The body exists as a possible sign of the "self." The "self," as well as the body, can be displaced but one cannot escape its socio-cultural representations. To this extent, Don Quixote places her exiled self under erasure, in Derridean terms, stressing both its provisionality and necessity. It is at this point that the body and its relation to conceptions of self-hood reach an *aporia* — the body must then re-write itself into the gaps that it encounters, and thus away from the absolutism of a definitive ending to her "quest," or, for that matter, an unproblematic beginning. The quest, like Acker's exploration of the body, and the construction of subjectivities that are written onto the body from both within and without, are constantly deferred, pointing to that *crisis in representation* that postmodernity and the posthuman mark.

Chapter Four — The Spectacle of the Simulacra: Virtual Bodies and Virtual Subjectivities in Empire of the Senseless

The lower back is bent, while the legs are pulled up from the right arm over the left breast surrounding the buttocks from over the head. The left side of the lower pubic region is pulled way up and left lying on the upper part of the slightly stretched right breast. If the lighting is good, the tender flesh is clearly seen from inside the camera. (Pell 126-127)

Derek Pell's parody of Jean de Berg's text The Image is a parody of the male gaze that, interestingly, turns the "voyeur," that powerful, unseen "I/eye," into a spectacle. The fiction of the unified "I," that categorizes and orders the "objects" of "his" gaze, is deconstructed from within as the text of the voyeur's eye turns against "him." The spectator *becomes* the fetishized object of the parodic text. The parodic text alternates between rendering the notion of the "subject" obsolete, and hyper-fortifying the "subject" through the use of repetition, or "refrain."

Analogous to Derek Pell's project, Kathy Acker's text Empire of the Senseless theorizes, through its parodic structure, the position of "humanity" and its identificatory strategies and technologies. The parodic text becomes a space of performative enunciation through which the virtualized "subject" speaks/writes/acts. The virtual subject desires its own "objectification" in order to create and to perform alter-realities, to escape the construction of itself from without as a "docile and obedient [subject]" (Seem xx). The virtual "subject," conversely, is positioned against legitimation, against closure, and, perhaps most importantly, against the "real." The virtual "subject" is nomadic; it deconstructs itself against the socio-culturally instituted "armored" subject, that "hyperreal" self that is defined by its apparent fixity and depth. The transitory nature of Deleuze and Guattari's dynamic

“subject” as process, the “subject” that is always already “on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes” (Anti-Oedipus 20), exposes the illusion of the armored subject that asserts its “unified” subjectivity in its excessive representational strategies. The terms within which the armored subject operates interestingly evoke the plight of the body within the spectacle of horror. In Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction, Scott Bukatman discusses the position of the specularized body within the discursive practices of the armored subject:

. . . while horror has become ever more dedicated to an obsessive centering upon the *body* of the subject, this does not necessarily mark a return to the *terms* of the subject. The return of the body could actually be understood as an obsession with the *surface* of the body. While the interior organs are externalized or revealed to the viewer’s fascinated gaze, the “depth” of subjectivity continues to be denied. The subject continues to be displaced. . . while the body is hyperbolized — opened up as it were — as an infinite set of surfaces (Baudrillard’s *fractal subject*). (261)

The hyper-representational strategies of the armored subject are the technologies of the endangered “human,” technologies which aim at containing that which has always already been placed under suspicion — that “objective illusion” of the stable subject.

The virtual “subject,” then, is parodic in the sense that Judith Butler outlines for the boundary play of gender parody. Butler notes:

The notion of gender parody. . . does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original... so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect — that is, in its effect — postures as an imitation. (Gender Trouble 138)

The decontextualization of the hegemonic “subject” from its discourses of legitimation — from its legitimating “real” — causes its virtualization, its performance of itself as a simulacrum of what Arthur Kroker terms a “historicized subjectivity” (The Possessed

Individual 116).

Abhor, in Acker's Empire of the Senseless, interrogates the construction of the "real," and its operational strategies. Abhor is a deferred identity, committed to partialities and fragmentation — "being" a part robot, part "black" female, Abhor's construction within the narrative is always already "about" carving out spaces of enunciation and subversion from both the margins of normative socialities, and from the end points of the "human." In recounting her "origins," Abhor locates her rape by her "Father" in an Enlightenment discourse of reason — rape and oppression become identical to the humanist project of progress. Abhor's own liberation is found through those historicized spaces of the irrational, and of the objectified:

The German Romantics had to destroy the same bastions as we do. Logocentrism and idealism, theology, all supports of the repressive society. Property's pillars. Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. The subjects, us, are now stable and socializable. Reason is always in the service of the political and economic masters. It is here that literature strikes, at this base, where the concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified. Well before Bataille, Kleist, Hoffman etc., made trial of Hegelian idealism, of the cloturing dialectic of recognition: the German Romantics. . . . tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self, the proper; dislocated you the puppet; cut the threads of meaning; spit at all mirrors which control. (Acker 12)

The socio-culturally constructed "human" body, here, asserts itself as a fundamentally *semiotic* structure. The "subject," as a linguistic marker of the politically *visible* gendered "human" body, is deconstructed by and *through* the very discursive structures that invoke the subject and that imbue the "subject" with its socio-cultural power. The importance, here, of "speaking through" normative discourses is a decidedly posthuman tactic. The

voice of the posthuman (in the above passage from Empire of the Senseless posthumanity is represented through the deconstructive practices of the German Romantics) “vibrates across and among an assemblage of semi-autonomous collectivities it knows it can never either be coextensive with nor altogether separate from” (Halberstam and Livingston 14).

In the opening section of Empire of the Senseless, Abhor “speaks through” Thivai in order to recount her personal “history.” Thivai operates as the mediator — translating Abhor’s posthuman experiences into a “human” language. However, once the text shifts to the alter, fantastical, worlds of dissonance and alterity, does Abhor begin to utilize her own voice to construct the narrative. The transition from “speaking through” to “speaking,” however, is problematized by the metafictional status of Abhor and Thivai’s “quest.” As Abhor relates to Thivai:

‘All I know is that we have to reach this construct. And her name’s Kathy.’

‘That’s a nice name. Who is she?’

‘It doesn’t mean anything.’

‘If it doesn’t mean anything, it’s dead. The cunt must be dead.’ My puns were dead.

‘Look. All I know is we have to reach this construct. I don’t know anything else.’

‘We have the capacities for understanding and, at the same time, we understand nothing,’ I replied. I understood we had to find some construct. (Acker 34)

Abhor and Thivai can only “know” what the author, Kathy Acker, allows them to know. Abhor and Thivai are always already speaking through the construct “Kathy.” Not only is the posited “reader” prevented entrance into an idealized fictional realm, but Acker’s status as “author-ity” is questioned as well. If “Kathy” is a construct then there is no definitive ordering “presence” behind the text. “Who,” or “what” is *Kathy Acker* speaking through?

In terms of the breakdown of Enlightenment conceptualizations of human reason that

punctuate Abhor and Thivai's narratives, Empire of the Senseless launches a raid upon those "bastions" of modern society that seek to organize the "human" into docile and obedient "subjects." Significantly, Abhor cites literature as containing the potential to subvert the cultural institutions of "[l]ogocentrism, idealism, theology" (Acker 12). This literature has a decidedly posthumanist agenda that operates in contradistinction to hegemonic writing.

As Shari Benstock points out:

Modernist writing focused on the "agency of language" as a vehicle of meaning. To whatever degree other defining characteristics of Modernism operated in juxtaposition, contradiction, or uneasy alignment with each other, the determined emphasis on the Word or Logos overshadowed all other divergences among Modernist writers. The one sacred, common belief seemed to be the indestructibility of the bond between the word and its meanings, between symbol and substance, between signifier and signified. (Textualizing the Feminine xxii-xxiii)

It is precisely this "sacred" identity between the word and what it seeks to represent, to *know*, that is placed under suspicion in Acker's text(s). As both Benstock and Acker (*through* Abhor and Thivai) reveal, logocentrism and idealism construct a theology that is guided by the Enlightenment sacraments of a naturalized notion of "progress," and the universalized capacity of *man*, the human subject, to reason.

Reason, as a homogenizing force which organizes the human subject, which inserts the subject into a normalizing socius, is disrupted (or, is capable of being disrupted) by a literature which plays with conventional structures of meaning and representation:

Here language was degraded. As daddy plumbed and plummeted away from the institute of marriage more and more downward deeply into the demimonde of public fake sex, his speech turned from the usual neutral and acceptable journalese most normal humans use as a stylus mediocris into...His language went through an indoctrination of nothingness, for sexuality had no more value in his world, until his language no longer had sense. Lack of meaning appeared as linguistic degradation. (Acker 17)

The language of transgressive sexuality (and thus the literature of transgressive sexuality) separates itself from the codings of normative society. The language of “perversion,” of “obscenity,” is both inside and outside the “human.” The “lack of meaning” that Abhor locates *in* her father is the language of the virtual subject. “Nonsense,” as Benstock asserts “must be ‘lost’ so that sense can properly function” (6). Abhor’s “father” then is disabled by his separation from reason, from his overcoding, because he is incapable of becoming-virtual, of becoming-molecular. His partiality, his degradation, is Sadean in nature, immersed in that simulacral “fake sex” which aspires to the virtual but is always already subsumed by the actual. The linguistic degradation that Abhor’s father *experiences* is the degradation of his awareness of “himself,” a material self that is deferred by his desire to be virtual, to attain the virtual. As Gilles Deleuze notes in “Coldness and Cruelty”: “In *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* the libertine states that he finds excitement not in ‘what is here,’ but in ‘what is not here,’ the absent Object, ‘the idea of evil.’ The idea of that which is not, the idea of the No or of negation which is not given. . .in experience. . .” (28). In this sense, Abhor’s father negates himself through his “language,” at least in terms of the maintenance of a normative “humanity.”

Abhor’s father is thus “monstrous” in the Sadean sense through his refusal (or inability to manipulate the mechanisms) of “reason,” to communicate and thus legitimize himself through normative language. In Sade My Neighbour, Pierre Klossowski outlines Sade’s alternative conceptualizations of the project of reason and its links to language and to the categorization of “humanity.” Klossowski points out that

[t]he medium of generality in Sade’s time is the logically structured language of the

classical tradition; in its structure this language reproduces and reconstitutes in the field of communicative gestures the normative structure of the human race in individuals....To this need to reproduce and perpetuate oneself. . .there corresponds the need to reproduce and perpetuate oneself by language. . . .With this principle of the normative generality of the human race in mind, Sade sets out to establish a counter generality that would obtain for the specificity of perversions. . . .These, in the existing normative generality, are defined by the absence of logical structure. Thus is conceived Sade's notion of integral monstrosity. (14)

In turn, the first part of Acker's Empire of the Senseless entitled "Elegy for the world of the Fathers" invokes this Sadean interrogation of Enlightenment reason. In its elucidation of an "anti-Oedipal" discourse, Acker's text exposes the virtualized subject that always already exists in and through the illusory, "actualized," Enlightenment subject: "Most humans felt totally disgusted by and repudiated both what they saw, what they felt, and the whole system of values behind the sex show and the pornographic. . . .novels sold outside the 'theatre.' In other words, the primal urge of sex had become a revolting phenomena" (Acker 17). Thus, just as Sade's countergenerality works to expose the "perversity" of reason and to construct the ethics of "outrage — which Sade understands to be the transgression of norms" (Klossowski 17), so too does Acker's text locate and articulate the positionality of "monstrosity," of "posthumanity," as a gap within the discourse of a classicist dialectic of "human" rationality.

It is important to note that this reconceptualization of language and desire in terms of a discourse of monstrosity is constructed by and through Abhor's narrative as filtered through Thivai. As Thivai, the "pirate" tells "us" in "Thivai's Story," "I shall now by means of my profound rational processes find the explanation for my madness, and human socially unacceptable behaviour" (Acker 30). Thivai's interrogation into the nature of his own

“perversity” fundamentally connects him to Abhor’s displaced “father.” The space of subjectivity, here the “property” of the “human” and its corresponding characteristics, markers, and representations, becomes a matter of “interpretation,” and thus “knowledge,” as filtered through the body. Like Abhor’s “father,” Thivai’s fragmented identity is intimately connected to his inability to reconcile the notions of desire and subjectivity in any “meaningful” way: “I thought all I could know about was human separation; all I couldn’t know, naturally, was death. Moreover, since the I who desired and the eye who perceived had nothing to do with each other and at the same time existed in the same body — mine: I was not possible. I, in fact was more than diseased” (Acker 33). The “I” to which Thivai refers is the “I” that is predicated upon an illusory wholeness, unity, and stability. Thivai’s perception, or understanding, of “himself” is always in terms of an inherent partiality or fragmentariness that is placed outside of normative conceptions of the “human.”

The “cyborgized,” reorganized body that circulates within and around Abhor’s and Thivai’s posthuman narratives is a body that is suspicious of the subject that speaks *through* the object, of the actual that speaks *through* the virtual. The privileged space of the actualized subject appropriates and domesticates the performative and shifting identities of the virtualized subject-object. It is necessary, within socialized spaces, for the language of the virtual subject-object to be translated, and thus reterritorialized, in order to bolster the position of the normative human subject. As Brian Massumi suggests, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of virtuality: “The virtual is the *unsaid* of the statement, the unthought of thought. It is real and subsists in them, but must be forgotten at least momentarily for a clear statement to be produced as evaporative surface effect” (46). The

virtual, in this sense, does not “speak to,” but rather speaks and is spoken “through” the various signifying structures that control and delimit its potentials and performances always within the socius.

Both Abhor and Thivai are constructed as “nomads” in the process of “becoming-virtual.” This process of virtualization involves itself in Acker’s critique of normalizing language systems. The search for the construct “Kathy” is the search for the transient body, a body that continuously subverts and evades social codings by parodying their strategies of control: “The code said: GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT YOUR MIND” (Acker 38). “Kathy’s” code, or perhaps more accurately her decoding, deconstructs the posited supremacy of a transcendent consciousness by re-embodying the mind. The body ingests the mind, consumes it and absorbs it into its physical properties. The construct’s “code” plays with the limits of language and language’s ability to represent and thus control “reality” or “realities.” As Deleuze suggests: “Words are at their most powerful when they compel the body to repeat the movements they suggest. . .” (“Coldness and Cruelty” 18).

The unstable language of the “construct” is dangerous because it threatens the power structures of meaning from within. The territory of cyberspace from which the “codes” are pulled is a site that reveals the flux between word and meaning, subject and object, the body and the mind. It is a space of terrorism because the body within the machine is simultaneously reterritorialized and deterritorialized. Thivai’s description of Abhor’s cybernetic body discloses the contradictory space of the fragmented, posthuman body:

Asleep. Naked. I saw her. A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimetres

below her crotch, the skin mottled by blue purple and green patches which looked like bruises but weren't. Black spots on the nails, finger and toe, shaded into gold. Eight derms, each a different colour size and form, ran in a neat line down her right wrist and down the vein of the right upper thigh. A transdermal unit, separated from her body, connected to the input trodes under the cast by means of thin red leads. A construct. (Acker 33-34)

The electronics, to Thivai's organizing eye, invade Abhor's body — the electronics effectively dismantle the "human." This deferral of the "human" is marked by the violence of the machine upon the "meat" body. Bukatman analyzes the images of the cybernetic "organism" as "spectacle" in a language that effectively theorizes Thivai's appraising gaze: "The body is dissolved: malleable as data and more ephemeral than its own stored image. Even sexuality is distilled to the meaninglessness of transparency and surface...and as with all special effects, the viewer's fascination is precisely with the spectacle of a surface" (*Terminal Identity* 245). Abhor's marginal, "perverse" body is objectified by Thivai's empirical organization of its "apparent" characteristics. Thivai's "conclusion" is a dismissal of both Abhor's humanity (in Thivai's reading of Abhor's body she is presented as "monstrous") and the assumed subjectivity that is contingent upon the "human" (Abhor is a "construct").

Abhor becomes interchangeable with that "other" construct, "Kathy," whose "code" effectively maps out the shifting terrain of body knowledges. The partitioning of, and allocation of, "spaces" of knowledge as "discriminatory" activities are evident in the fortification of Abhor's gendered and racialized, de-humanized, identification *through* Thivai's representational practices. Within the text Thivai is the revolutionary subject who is simultaneously repelled by and obsessed with Abhor's fluidity, with her "inhumanity": "I

asked Abhor what she wanted with me. Did she also want to destroy my identity?" (Acker 31). The threat to the masculinist human subject, not surprisingly, is located in the "feminine," in the suspect body.

Thivai's subjectivity, however, is not stable. He may take momentary comfort in his "humanity" but he is always already threatened by his own partialities, his status as "outlaw," his sexual "polymorphism," his amorality: "I who would have and would be a pirate: I cannot. I who live in my mind which is my imagination as everything — wanderer adventurer fighter Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces — I am nothing in these times" (Acker 26). Thivai's fragmented identity is contextualized in terms of an ironic nostalgia for a "lost" individualism, an individualism which, moreover, is predicated upon the ideal of personal autonomy and a specifically patriarchal economy of desire. Humanity becomes, for Thivai, equated with the "history" of war, a history which marks the human subject and constructs for the subject its desires: "If becoming adult equals the process of acquiring self-consciousness, my first recognition of my adult self was my perception of my desire to torture and kill. I hated" (Acker 29). For Thivai violence is an archetypal memory that alternately forms his identity — provides *his self* with "meaning" — and also denies his integral self. Thivai can only *be* through his "mind" (the philosophical "history" of Western consciousness), through his "dreams," but he is *actually* (virtually) "nothing" within the posthumanist textual universe of Empire of the Senseless.

When Thivai speaks of his inherent evil, his desire to salvage and reinscribe the human against its simulacra, he speaks of his fear of the posthuman "other": "For forceless humans are dead. We should use force to fight representations which are idols, idolized images. . ."

(Acker 94). He is, as Baudrillard observes in Simulacra and Simulation, that traumatized subject which both fears and desires his iconic double:

Of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is doubtless the oldest. But the double is precisely not a prosthesis: it is an imaginary figure, which, just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like his other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death. This is not always the case, however: when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death. (95)

The power of *actualized* representations to thwart the “real” is not coincidentally taken up by both Baudrillard and Acker in terms of the complex positionality of the cyborg. For Thivai, Abhor is that monstrous “other,” part idol, part flesh — the representation of his own subjective death that he seeks to simultaneously eradicate and embrace. Throughout the text of Empire of the Senseless Thivai’s quest for the construct “Kathy” becomes intertwined with his various quests to re-locate Abhor and to contain her erratic lines of flight, evasions, and exiles from the community of the human.

Within the narrative of Empire of the Senseless Abhor attempts to construct for herself an increasingly “rhizomatic” space that becomes more diffuse and fractured as she negotiates the localized terrains of a decidedly posthuman revolutionary universe: “Exile was a permanent condition. A permanent community, in terms of relationships and language. In terms of identity. But from what was identity exiled?” (Acker 63). Abhor’s examination of her positionality as a space of exile necessarily calls into question normative orderings of “community,” of what constitutes and thereby determines socialities. In the revolutionary context of an Algerian “take-over” of Paris a “new” anti-Oedipal order comes to surface. It is within this context that Abhor’s question, “But from what was identity

exiled?" takes on particular significance. "Identity" as a means to categorize and thus to "fix" or essentialize bodies is a representational practice whose aim is to control those bodies through "relationships," and through "language." The "perverse" body gives meaning to the normalized, socialized body. The relational status of all dichotomous, identificatory terms (subject/object, man/woman, normal/deviant) as they pertain to organizing bodies within and around the socius is disrupted by the lines of flight that the revolutionary bodies draw away from the homogenizing center. Thus, in a posthuman sense, identity becomes exiled from the systems of meaning that attempt to exert a stabilizing "presence" from without; identity is no longer an interpretation of a "real" condition of "being," it is fluid, performative, perverse, and criminal.

Abhor's interrogation into the identity of criminality and the exiled body is initiated by her encounter with the Cuban sailor Agone. For Abhor, Agone "exists" outside of the socio-cultural institutions which constitute "reality" because he is shifting, nomadic, "imaginative." In this sense, Agone catalyzes a series of "becomings" for Abhor; in terms of the process of Abhor's deferred, mis-placed, and tangential quest, Agone is her "epiphany," her transformative experience:

I used to think I was a lost being. That I didn't fantasize. That I had no sexual desire. Real sexuality or identity. Lost in a maze that, perhaps, was politically controlled. Just Agone's physical presence somehow mirrored, presented to me a sexuality which was mine and which I had never known. Due to Agone, I was no longer nothing. I was now on my way to being somebody. A criminal. (Acker 120)

Abhor's *realization* of her own state of abjection, her "becoming-object," is marked by the breakdown of her body as a "recognizable," gendered "sign." She encounters Agone only after she has "visibly" altered her constitutive "I" — she "appears" in the drag of a male

lieutenant with her head shaved. The significance, then, of Agone representing “her” mirrored “other” seems to repudiate both the necessity of “subjecthood” and “alienation” in terms of the construction of the “real,” and in terms of the formation of stable selves (that is, the development of the ego, or the discernible, fixed “I”).

For Abhor, becoming-object is the refusal of the divided subject in favour of an absorption into the double, that fluid subject-object that, significantly, is outside of the Oedipal regime. Agone is not her mirrored, split “other” but her fantasy double. Rosemary Jackson in “Narcissism and Beyond” provides a psychoanalytic analysis of this construction of self outside of the Oedipal paradigm:

What seems to happen in fantasies of dualism is a reversal of the Oedipal drama *and* a reversal of the mirror stage — a repudiation of the dominance both of the Father and of the Ideal ego, the I, formed with the subject. It is an unlearning of the distinction between body and what lies outside it, a non-identification with the reflection in the mirror, and its ego outline, a desire for that state *preceding* the fall into alienation. It is an attempt to loosen, or to lose, the ego and its dominance by uncovering something less fixed, less formed, less nameable, and, inevitable, less social. (46)

This “doubled” identification that Abhor “realizes” through Agone (with the accompanying signification of “violence” that operating “through” suggests) is an identification that critiques the psychoanalytic organization of the subject and the subject’s subsequent insertion into the socius. The locus of the subject, the space that Abhor refuses, is seductive because it is a position that promises those ideals of stability and unity that buttress social formations. Abhor and Agone, however, occupy the position of the displaced subject-object, a nomadic positionality that, significantly, lies outside the socius, raiding socialities in order to critique and parody their techniques of control. The subject-object makes no promises;

it only, through its “lines of flight,” reveals the “objective illusion” of the subject’s inner coherence.

The subject-object is extra-functional in the sense that it operates both beyond and within socio-cultural systems. The subject-object is about “movement” within the flows of desire that are suppressed by the normalizing socius: “Since the world has disappeared: rather than objects, there exists that smouldering within time where and when subject meets object. The voluptuousness of your thighs. Odours seeping out of cunt juice and semen. Since the only mirrors are distorted; all is secret” (Acker 38-39). The subject-object abandons itself to the margins of the body. It is virtualized, allowing itself only to be traced through the body’s orifices, in its odours and “secret” secretions. Here, the body is not a space that is territorialized, or “conquered” by the subject-object. Alternately, the subject-object places itself conspicuously outside of the production of historically contingent, sexually differentiated subjectivities. This “postmodern” body that is articulated through the discourses of Empire of the Senseless’s “outlaws” is a body that is wrenched from the technologies of control that seek to socialize and contain its flows through language and other codification strategies.

The virtualized bodies of Empire of the Senseless are “fetishistic,” are “embodied” fetishes in the sense that Ira Livingston outlines in “Indiscretions: of body, gender, technology.” As Livingston suggests, “[a] fetish embodies a contradiction, never simply to resolve or neutralize or transcend it but to animate and activate it, to prolong it” (99). Livingston’s conceptualization of the postmodern body as fetish is important to an analysis of Acker’s construction of the subject-object as the outlawed body because like Acker’s

posthuman bodies, Livingston's fetish is situated outside of "Freudian or Marxist pathologizations of the fetish whereby proper sexual investment eroticizes the genitalia (not a detachable part or a certain vignette) or whereby value property inheres in human activity and relations (not in their alienable products)" (Livingston 98-99). Abhor's body, as the fusion of flesh and machine — the "hard" and the "soft" — *is* this "embodied fetish." In turn, Thivai *as pirate* and Agone *as nomad sailor* are themselves fetishes in the de-organized economies of desire that construct Acker's narrative. It is thus the "imperative" of the postmodern body (and its various incarnations "as" virtual, criminal, fetish, posthuman cyborg) to challenge the socio-cultural boundaries of the normalized body by *becoming-subject* — Abhor's cyborgism and blurring of naturalized "humanisms" such as race, gender and sexuality; Thivai's Sadean manifestations; and Agone's nomadism and body "violence" (Agone's encounter with redefining his "surfaces" through tattooing) are all technologies of the subject.

The language of this abjected body that is performed through Abhor, Thivai, and Agone is the language of the tattoo. The tattoo becomes a re-marking of the body, a way to deterritorialize the socialized body from its moorings in an Enlightenment discourse which conceives of the body in terms of the organization of, and conquest of, space. Tattooing, within the posthuman context of Empire of the Senseless operates as a prosthesis. The tattoo extends, and in a fundamental sense, exteriorizes the virtual body's subject-subject-object positionality:

Cruel Romans had used tattoos to mark and identify mercenaries, slaves, criminals, and heretics.

For the first time, the sailor felt he had sailed home.

Among the early Christians, tattoos, stigmata indicating exile, which at first had been forced on their flesh, finally actually served to enforce their group solidarity. The Christians began voluntarily to acquire these indications of tribal identity. Tattooing continued to have ambiguous social value; today a tattoo is considered both a defamatory brand and a symbol of a tribe or of a dream.

In 1769, when Captain James Cook 'discovered' Tahiti, he thought he had sailed to paradise. In Tahitian, writing is 'ta-tau'; the Tahitians write directly on human flesh. (Acker 130)

Acker's historiography of the tattooed body is also the story of the categorization and colonization of the body as a discursive product. The body is always already "marked," and thus, in this sense, the tattoo functions as a contradictory "sign," as that unresolved "embodied fetish" that Livingston invokes that simultaneously constructs and displaces identificatory techniques. The tattooed body, ultimately, *is* posthuman in its play with the body as a space of representation that is never absolute nor prior to the discourse that constructs it.

The tattoo, for Agone, becomes a sign of the dismantling of the colonizing subject precisely because it is first and foremost an inherently *ambiguous* signification. The tattooed body performs what can be *seen* as a destabilizing force by recontextualizing, and reappropriating, for its own uses, the systems of meaning and identification that revolve in and around the policed body. When Acker inserts the "ta-tau" into her genealogy of the marked/marking body, she suggests the multiplicity integral to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "body without organs":

The body without organs is produced as a whole but in its own particular place within the process of production, alongside the parts that it neither unifies nor totalizes. And when it operates on them, when it turns back upon them. . . it brings about transverse communications, transfinite summarizations, polyvocal and transcurive inscriptions on its own surface, on which the functional breaks of partial objects are continually intersected by breaks in the signifying chains, and by breaks effected by a subject

that uses them as reference points in order to locate itself. The whole not only co-exists with all the parts; it is contiguous to them, it exists as a product that is produced apart from them and yet at the same time is related to them. (*Anti-Oedipus* 43-44)

The “ta-tau,” the language “made” flesh/the flesh “making” language, becomes associated not just with the spatialization of desire (Cook’s “paradise”) but, as well, with the body language that is associated, in turn, with the “mercenaries, slaves, criminals, and heretics” (Acker 130). The tattooed body as marked “other” is *both* this space of desire and marginalization that the body without organs represents to the socius. The tattoo, like the body without organs, “is the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialized socius” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 33).

The tattoo as the marker of the identity in exile is celebrated through the discourse which encircles Agone. This *fleshly* writing is the medium through which hegemonic systems of meaning can be critiqued. Tattooing functions here as the language of supplementarity, a making *visible* of the unconscious articulations of desire as a state of the virtual self:

Its primary language must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren’t acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn’t per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes.

This new way of tattooing consisted of raising defined parts of the flesh up with a knife. The tattooer then draws a string through the raised points of flesh. Various coloration methods can be used on the living points. (Acker 134)

The language of the unconscious that is “materialized” in the tattoo redefines the body’s relationship to normative constructions of self and subjectivity. This “new” language reconfigures the body outside of the discourses of control that govern the socialized body: Acker alludes to the “institutions of prison” which necessarily include those discourses of

medicalization, criminality, “madness,” and perversion that delimit the classical boundaries of the body within the socius. The tattoo, as a visual and spatial redefinition of the body’s surfaces, of its ostensible “outer” boundaries, is *polyscopic*¹ in its performative functioning, a “visual sign” of the *becoming-body without organs*. Here, the distinction between the subject and object of the gaze is deconstructed. The tattooed body is the space that controls the movement of the reifying gaze, defining the “limits” of the gaze and its constitutive eye/I.

The deconstruction of subjectivity through a re-making of the flesh responds to the conception of the embodied, gendered, subject. The body, as reconceived through Acker’s critique of the coded spaces of representation that “figure” the body within institutionalized discourses of meaning, is the locus for the dismantling of the “prisons” that close the body off to its performative possibilities. The tattooed body is simultaneously the seen and the unseen, it is a “virtual” body that moves alongside subjectivized and historicized/actualized bodies:

In decadent phases, the tattoo became associated with the criminal — literally the outlaw — and the power of the tattoo became intertwined with the power of those who chose to live beyond the norms of society.

In the same manner, normal society had ruled that he shouldn’t love another man, but he was, that he shouldn’t come simultaneously with another man, but —

1

I use “polyscopic” as the term has been theorized by Helga Geyer-Ryan in “Imaginary Identity: Space, Gender, Nation.” Geyer-Ryan suggests: “In visual terms, what is required against the domination of the reifying gaze is the construction of a whole register of different ways of looking, an approach that could give rise. . .to a theory of polyscopy. In spatial terms, this construction means developing a capacity for mobility, transitory states, nomadism, and voyaging, the occupation of places in different narratives or the renaming of old places and spaces would like wise be involved in rituals of mobility” (123).

The realm of the outlaw has become redefined: today, the wild places which excite the most profound thinkers are conceptual. Flesh unto flesh. (Acker 140)

The history of the criminalized body, in the tracing of its physicalized surfaces — in the *visual* markers of the body's *psychic* monstrosities — occupies relative socio-cultural positionings to the queer body, and to othered, outlawed, marginalized bodies. The outlawed body becomes an effect of institutionalized regimes of meaning, as the normative body becomes hyperactualized in an effort to reinforce its foundational premises — its inherent claims to subject-hood, inner coherence, purity, linearity/"straightness." When Judith Butler speaks of "the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality" (Gender Trouble viii), she is speaking of the *effacement* of those identities that are constructed on the periphery of socialities. Similarly, when Agone invokes the power of the outlawed body he is detailing the power relations of representation and "meaning" within which the "normative" becomes a function of the "perverse."

Abhor is the mediator of Agone's experience with the tattooist, with his experience of *becoming-abject*. As the narrative slips between Agone's sensual apprehension of *being* marked and Abhor's position as voyeur, Abhor positions herself as Agone's anti-Oedipal double, inside Agone's experience. Abhor's positionality marks that state of deferred being that, as Kroker points out, articulates a virtualized subjectivity: "Not simply the old tensions of 'paranoic investments' and 'schizoid breaks,' but something new, a romance of the doubling as the essential feature of the virtual self" (The Possessed 116). Abhor does not control the scene. The "I" in the "telling" is ambiguous and perhaps ultimately irrelevant. As the tattooist remarks: "I make fortunes here. I don't need to tell or be told anything. For

me the only telling's making" (Acker 130).

The deferred subject position of abject discourse is important to the "terms" of Abhor's relationship to Agone which complicates traditional conceptions of fantasies of the double as self and projection. Abhor and Agone are embodiments of the chaotic partiality of posthumanity:

Male hand on male hand. Stomach on stomach. Male feet on male feet. Mouth on mouth. Cock on cock. Agone pulled away from the tattooer before either of them came because he didn't want to reach any port.

No roses grow on a sailor's grave.

As the two men moved away from each other, I went outside into the morning's beginning. (Acker 140)

As such partialities, Abhor and Agone circulate in and through each other. The focus, in the above passage, is cinematic in its "cuttings" to/of the body's various surfaces and extremities, in the narrative's fragmented, constructed perspective. It is, above all, an abject scene "[proceeding] by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles, and cuts" (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 141). Agone, like Abhor, is *estranged*; identity, or the fixing of "himself," is always already displaced, deferred — "he didn't want to reach any port" (Acker 140). Agone refuses the constitution of self that the orgasm would indicate — he cannot be "specified" through an assertion of "presence." Agone retreats before the specter of his own actualization for, as Baudrillard suggests, "when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death" (Simulacra 95).

Interestingly, Agone's discourse on the criminalized body is filtered through Thivai in the section on, "The Violence of Those Who Are Alone In Jail/The Violence of Roses." The genealogy of the written body is pathologized, albeit ironically, in Thivai's invocation of the

“signs” of criminality:

Between one-third and two-thirds of all prison inmates wear tattoos. Being tattooed shows a tendency for violence, property crime, and self-destruction or self-mutilation. There is a ‘strong relationship between tattooing and the commission of violent, assaultive acts. This propensity toward violence in general may well be signalled by the violence these men have done to themselves in the form of tattooing.’ — some doctor. (Acker 148)

The irony, here, is not just in the abstract generality of authority implicit in the parodic legitimating addendum “some doctor,” but as well in the revolutionary context in which it appears. Violence and criminality have been redefined *outside* the CIA jail in which Thivai finds himself. The liberation of the minoritarian body through the Algerian revolution in Paris has *fractalized* the orders of meaning that would attribute signification to such notions as the “criminal.” The virtuality of the criminal in post-revolutionary Paris suspends the sociological discourse of “some doctor,” which, in itself, acts as an already redundant mode of cultural translation. The virtual “subject” can only be inserted into an economy of power relations through this process of translation — through its “actualization” in normative discourses. Thus, the prison is an invented space which, like the delegitimated sovereignty of “some doctor,” has no authority over Thivai’s virtualized body: “One day I decided it was time to leave prison. I simply walked out” (Acker 170).

The space of the prison is a linguistic space within which “deviance” is contained. In Empire of the Senseless, the age of the panopticon has been surpassed by the *self*-policing body; as Thivai realizes, he could have left the prison at any time. The self-ordered body is what Foucault would term a “technical mutation” from a modernist system of punishment to a postmodernist diffusion of the principles of institutionalized discipline that manifests

itself through the actualized subject. Thivai leaves the prison as a self-policing agent. This is evidenced in his reunion with Abhor and his subsequent betrayal of her in a series of scenes which parody Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:

Dear CIA,

The runaway nigger who engineered the bust-in to your Washington computer library a year ago is now floating down the Seine in an old rowboat. I know where she is and am willing to lead you to her for lots of money.

Yours sincerely,
Captain Blood
(X) (Acker 192)

Thivai continues, "I mailed this note. Now I was cleaned of all sin and pure. The truth was that I had never known sin before I had met Abhor" (192).² The interrogation into the socio-cultural production of "freedom" and "humanity" that Twain's text launches against his contemporary society is taken up by Acker as part of the posthuman project. Thivai's desire for a "clean" and "pure" body is the desire for what Kristeva theorizes as "the integrity of one's 'own and clean self'" (Powers of Horror 53). This is, however, not so clearly a case of Thivai's integration into a normalizing socius. Thivai operates according to the logic of cruelty, which is perhaps a hyperrepresentation of the purified, disciplined body.

Thivai uses the Oedipal ordering of "the law" to punish and control Abhor's "deviant" body. It is not so much that he operates as a passive functionary of patriarchal law. Instead, it appears that Thivai exploits the organizational structures of the socius in order to enact his own claim of ownership over Abhor's body. Patriarchy operates as one structure among

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The text of Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn that is parodied by Acker reads: "Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send./ HUCK FINN./ I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time" (Clemens 169).

many that Thivai selectively appropriates in order to best manipulate his surroundings. In Thivai's narrative he himself operates as the individual mediator of all experience, informing and interpreting textual events by playing with the limits of power and meaning. Thivai takes patriarchy, as it were, to its "logical" telos. This logic of cruelty is a logic that is denaturalized, and deterritorialized, from the social institutions that regulate "human" behaviour. Thivai's "cruelty" is the stratagem of the inhuman. As Deleuze and Guattari note:

Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural violence that might be commissioned to explain the history of mankind; cruelty is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belaboring them. That is what cruelty means. (*Anti-Oedipus* 145)

Thivai's "marking" of Abhor's body in racialized and gendered terms is, in effect, *itself* an effect of the recuperation of the *becoming-virtual* by the socius whose movement, as noted by Deleuze and Guattari, is the movement of cruelty. Thivai's posthuman "voice" is mediated by its filtration through the mechanisms of the appropriative socius and the various cultural texts that themselves are implicated in the maintenance of the human, and the human's various identificatory systems. Thivai *uses* the language of the socius *because* there is no other language at his "immediate" disposal with which he is able to articulate his relationship to Abhor. Thivai's state of *becoming* is a conflicted positionality that moves between institutionalized structures of representation and the subversion of those structures through his "play" with their very limits. By employing the language and systems of the normative socius, Thivai exposes its dominant representational technologies.

Thivai's ambivalence, as it is written *into* the text, *stresses* (emphasizes *and* endangers)

the construction of the “subject” within the socio-cultural institutions that require the subject for their own coherence and “meaning.” Through the parodic revisioning of the narrative sequencing of Twain’s text, Acker’s Empire of the Senseless foregrounds the contingent nature of conceptualizations of “freedom” and “humanity,” notions that are simultaneously, and paradoxically, contested and *perceived* of as “givens.” As Twain’s text brilliantly asserts, “freedom” and “humanity,” or “subject-hood,” are indeed political prerogatives of “those” who are “inside” the normative boundaries of the social. As Mark, Thivai’s lover, asserts of Abhor: “Abhor’s not a slave, even if she is a runaway nigger. She’s as free as any cretur who walks this earth” (Acker 212).³ What Acker inserts into Twain’s text is the *actualized* ontology of the outlawed body within the socius. Abhor, like Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, is always already a “fixed” body, identified — “a runaway nigger.” The rhetorical circularity then of attributing “freedom” and “humanity” to Abhor’s abjected body is already itself a deconstruction of the “subject” as a socio-cultural production.

Abhor’s “liberation” through Mark and Thivai requires her transformation into “a great woman writer” (Acker 203). Writing, as a process, is as Thivai shows, not an intrinsically revolutionary action — Mark and Thivai teach Abhor how to “write properly”: “Mark didn’t listen to her palavering, but held her right thumb down, and I sliced into it. We held her right thumb down cause Abhor wrote with her right hand. Writers need disability or madness they can overcome in order to write” (203). Abhor’s construction as “writer”

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Twain’s text here reads: “They hain’t no *right* to shut him up! *Shove!* — and don’t you lose a minute. Turn him loose! He ain’t no slave; he’s as free as any cretur that walks this earth!” (Clemens 226).

becomes implicated in the discourses of cruelty that Mark and Thivai *imagine by*. At this point in the narrative, Abhor is *subject to* the desires of the matrices of power from both inside and outside the bounds of the social. Her imprisonment becomes less literally the isolation and punishment of her body by agents of the hegemonic socio-cultural order and more an issue of the possibilities for disruption within dominant sites of “meaning.”

Abhor’s “education” as masculine ritual (her blood as ink) is subverted by her refusal to upproblematically reproduce her lessons. The intertexts of “writing and drawing” that Thivai imposes upon Abhor are reappropriated by her in the questioning of both Thivai’s authority and the systems of “meaning” that his writing demands. The struggle between Abhor and Thivai for control over the process of writing is, as well, the struggle to realize Acker’s project of that transgressive language of the unconscious, that non-thetic language that, within the realm of the “human,” can never be articulated:

I explained that these hearts were applicable because they were senseless. To write is to reveal a heart’s identity. Abhor heard me, squeezed some more blood out, and traced, rather than drew, her own, the lonely heart. Cause she wasn’t able to write by herself yet. Then like a baby falling flat on her or his face, she printed the words FUCKFACES ALL MEN then THE SHIP IS SINKING right over the bloody heart. (Acker 204)

Thivai is literally teaching Abhor to tattoo. The figuration of “hearts and banners” written in Abhor’s blood is a transposition of the tattoo from the skin onto another surface. The tattoo thus resituated becomes a tracing of its own potentiality as virtualized effect. The tattoo in this sense is latent but it still entails the marking of Abhor’s body — the slicing of her body to produce blood for ink. Abhor’s body is the contested terrain upon which the battle for control of identity and language is waged.

Abhor at this point refuses to be passively constructed from without. She rejects not only the systems of meaning that are imposed on her, but as well the historiographies of gender and humanity that circulate around her body. As Abhor suggests in a letter to Mark and Thivai: "Everytime I talk to one of you, I feel like I'm taking layers of my own epidermis, which are layers of still freshly bloody scar tissue, black brown and red, and tearing each one of them off so more and more of my blood shoots into your face. This is what writing is to me a woman" (210). Abhor speaks here of the state of abjection that discards the illusive coherence of the socialized body in order to reveal the inherent fragility of self and identity. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Julia Kristeva theorizes the dissolution of the surfaces of identity in the same terms that Abhor charts the breakdown of the gendered body's boundaries. Kristeva notes:

The body's inside. . . shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. (53)

Abhor's discourse on "writing" indicates this process of "self unmaking," as Ihab Hassan called it The Dismemberment of Orpheus, that accompanies the body's radical separation from its moorings in gendered socio-cultural systems. The gendered body, as it is actualized in conventional phallogentric semiotic structures, is, at best, as Kristeva points out, "a fragile container" that is always already in danger, always a site of potential dissolution. This, shown through both Acker and Kristeva, is the process of virtualization.

The sacrifice of the body implicated in the act of writing *through* gendered paradigms is seen not only in Abhor's discourse on the experience of writing *as* a "woman," but as well

in her rejection of occupying a marginal position within Thivai and Mark's community. Abhor's desire for a kind of sublime freedom of the body, for the nomad existence, is recuperated and commodified by the systemizations of the pirate and the motorcycle gang in the respective logics of both Thivai and Mark. For Abhor, the pirates and the biker gangs are complex socializations of her nomadic ideals, the sailor and the wanderer. The workings of "transgression" as a ritualized, or socially relational act reinforce normative codings of identity, society, and representation in the same way that Acker's critique of language play reveals:

Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning. But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions. (Acker 134)

In terms of the narrative events of Empire of the Senseless, the slippages between the normative and the outlawed reveal not only the reciprocal nature of the law and its transgression but as well the theoretical Catch-22 that their very articulation presents. Susan Rubin Suleiman in Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde points out, similarly, that the politics of excess that the transgression examines is always already mediated by its sacralized effect. The subversive possibilities of the transgression are recuperated by the socius insofar as they are incorporated/legalized in ritual practices: "The experience of transgression is indissociable from the consciousness of the constraint or prohibition it violates; indeed, it is precisely by and through its transgression that the force of a prohibition becomes fully realized" (75).

Acker's text operates to reveal the possibilities of the virtual body whose code,

“DISCIPLINE AND ANARCHY” (Acker 229) elucidates the paradoxical situation of the posthuman self. In response to recent feminist celebrations of a politics of location, the posthuman self exposes the body as a site of conflicting forces that is never neat, orderly or so easily contained within one epistemological project or another. The posthuman body slides between and through discourses of the body pointing, finally, to the inability to know the body as a totality:

...I thought about how a sword pierces a cunt. Only my cunt is also me. The sword pierces me and my blood comes out.

It doesn't matter who has handled and shoved in this sword. Once this sword is in me, it's me. I'm the piercer and the pierced. Then I thought about all that had happened to me, my life, and all that was going to happen to me, the future: chance and my endurance. Discipline creates endurance. All is blood. (Acker 224)

The gendered, embodied subject is as unstable as the subject that is rooted in consciousness. The subject-object state that Acker theorizes in Empire of the Senseless is a condition that answers to the limitations of various conceptions of subjectivity. The boundaries of the gendered body are violated by their reorganization under the virtualized subject-object. Abhor expresses the terms of the gendered body as it is essentialized from without — her body, her actualized subjectivity within the socius — is marked by the closed equation *identity=genitals*. This identity, however, for Abhor is fluid and permeable — a disciplined anarchy that is always already the condition of the hybrid body, “All is blood” (224). In the abject spaces that Abhor inhabits the body's organs are exteriorized and displace the traditional surface boundaries of the gendered body. The body becomes a site of violence upon which Abhor reclaims a *sense* of agency that distinctly rejects her place within the community that Mark and Thivai offer.

The subject-object that Acker outlines is a function of those transgressive bodily excesses that displace gender and that deconstruct the socialized surfaces of the body. Abhor's declaration that her identity as a "woman," indeed, that "[a]ll is blood," disorganizes the tenuous distinction between inside and outside, and between subject and object. Kristeva points to the borders of the body, its orifices, as the loci for the consolidation *and* contestation of power: "Menstrual blood. . .stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (Powers of Horror 71). Abhor rejects her position as "cunt" as it is understood within masculinist social structures. In this sense, Abhor's reappropriation of not only the language of misogyny but, as well, her reclamation of the power that her body has been denied, constructs an alternate space from which both the body and gender can be theorized. Abhor, in the end/beginning, rejects absolutism and celebrates indeterminacy as the site of multiplicity from which the body's potentials can be played out: "I stood there, there in the sunlight, and thought that I didn't as yet know what I wanted. I now fully knew what I didn't want and what and whom I hated. That was something" (Acker 227).

Chapter Five — The Body Confessed: Revaluating the Politics of Masochism in Blood and Guts in High School

...baudy acts need the baudy ejaculations; the erotic, full-flavored expressions, which even the chastest indulge in when lust, or love, is in its full tide of performance. So I determined to write my private life freely as to fact, and in the spirit of the lustful acts done by me, or witnessed; it is written therefore with absolute truth and without any regard whatever for what the world calls decency. Decency and voluptuousness in its fullest acceptance cannot exist together, one would kill the other. . . (Anonymous 7)

The anonymous “confessor” of My Secret Life points to a kind of semantic disjunction that brackets and thus problematizes articulations of *truth* and *reality* as naturalized effects of the confession. What My Secret Life exhibits, as we shall see in Acker’s Blood and Guts in High School, is desire as linguistic transgression, which necessarily implicates the body and its culturally constructed identities in its self-deconstructive processes. The inscription of “obscene” desires upon the body becomes, in itself, an interrogation of various socialized “authenticities” and “wholes.” The obscene body, in retaliation against these closed structures of “being” and “meaning,” celebrates its partiality, its fluidity, its movement towards the non-thetic from within the linguistic confines of the thetic. The sexual confession, in particular, opens itself to those inarticulable spaces of the non-thetic by grounding itself in the obscene which, as Kristeva notes in Desire in Language, “[perceives] the limits of a phenomenological linguistics faced with the heterogeneous and complex architectonics of significance” (143).

The confession is itself an integral part of the politics of the masochistic body. The play between the performances of power and language within the enunciative act of the confession marks, in particular, Janey’s experience of her “self” as a site of conflict, and as

an effect of gendered cultural discourse. Acker's text, significantly, parodies the popular construction of "woman" as masochist in order to examine the underlying mechanisms of desire that inform and entrench gender distinctions within the social. Arthur F. Redding suggests: "Masochism in Acker emerges from the familiar — and familial — cultural processes whereby the despised image of the self is internalized" ("Bruises, Roses" 285). Redding, in his analysis of masochism in Acker's texts, pinpoints the central issue of the abject body as the locus for the "violence" that underlies the formation of the subject (281). In line with Redding's analysis the confessed body exposes the limits of the socialized subject and calls into question the "authority" which impels the "I" and that ultimately legitimizes it as a functionary of the socius. As Theodor Reik notes, the "compulsion to confess" operates as one of the "demonstrative" aspects of masochism (Masochism in Modern Man 77). The masochistic body, then, constructs itself as an open text of the abject which reaches beyond even the counter-aesthetics of the "ugly" and "disgusting" body and self that Redding traces. The deconstruction of the subject that the confession enacts locates itself both inside and outside the socio-culturally constituted "body" and its orders of identity.

The interrogation of the "I" that desires, that the sexual confession initiates, foregrounds the construction and status of the subject as the interpreter of the "real." In Blood and Guts the "subject" is placed under suspicion through the text's emphasis upon the "fictionality" of the confessing voice. "Janey Smith" articulates a deferred or hidden identity that parodies the confession's claim to *truth* as an expiatory effect of the process of "telling." The "I" of Blood and Guts is fragmented and perverse thus contextualizing the self and the self's

relation to the “real” as a site of blurring and indeterminacy: “Janey was. . .very pretty, but she was kind of weird-looking because one of her eyes was lopsided” (Acker 7). Janey’s confessed body is positioned from the outset as a kind of dislocation. Janey is represented not so much as a divided or an alienated subject but as a *disalignment* of the *space* of subjectivity, both as subjectivity is inscribed upon the body and as it is produced as an effect of consciousness.

Janey’s unstable “I/eye” suggests as well the performativity of the “real” as it is deployed in the act of telling Janey’s “history.” Janey’s biography, like her vision, plays with the real, rendering its configurations, its signs, “fantastic.” As Rosemary Jackson notes of the realm of the fantastic: “The subject’s relation to the phenomenal world is made problematical and the text foregrounds the impossibility of definitive interpretation or vision: everything becomes equivocal, blurred, ‘double’, out of focus” (*Fantasy* 49). The multiplicity of experience and position that the fantastic signals is marked not only by Janey’s drifting “I/eye” but, as well, by the fluidity of identities that are no longer capable of fixing “subjects” within a normalizing socius: “Never having known a mother, her mother had died when Janey was a year old, Janey depended on her father for everything and regarded her father as boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father” (Acker 7). Janey’s “father,” Johnny Smith, is an indicator of the structures of power that construct gender and sexual relationships on local levels — here, within the structure of the “family.” Johnny’s *virtual* anonymity, as his name suggests, elaborates upon the critique of self and identity that is launched by Janey’s story. The instability of identities in the text violates the laws that establish and entrench the normalized body within the socius, opening the body/text up to

the possibilities of the perverse, to the spaces of the obscene.

The fractured identities and relationships that inform the text of Blood and Guts have important implications for a politics of the “sexual confession.” As Alphonso Lingis suggests, structures of meaning shape sexual discourse according to socio-cultural distinctions drawn between the normative and the perverse:

The secret of sex that is confessed has to be interpreted by another. Sexual practices will be interpreted no longer in the register of fault and sin, excess or transgression, but according to the axes of the normal and the pathological. The hermeneutics of sexual data will delineate a pathology of instinct behind unhealthy tendencies, images, pleasures, and practices — abnormal and pathogenic, in turn, of physical and psychic maladies. (Foreign Bodies 69)

In Blood and Guts, however, there is no sense of the division that Lingis points out between the normal and the pathological. The function of the confession is thus opened up to analyses of the confession as a kind of sexual pedagogy, as a discursive practice that positions the reader and the confessor in an alliance that fashions itself as a masochistic contract. A politics of the “monstrous” and the perverse becomes the end result in place of the traditional expurgation and announcement of “shame” that is the dominantly conceived function of the confession.

The masochistic relationship that the sexual confession constructs is based upon the play of language and meaning within the discourse of sexuality. In “Coldness and Cruelty,” Gilles Deleuze notes of Masoch’s texts: “We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest

of schemes” (20). Indeed, in Blood and Guts, Janey’s interactions with Johnny, and later with the Persian slave trader and Genet, evoke both the contractual and the pedagogical nature of the masochistic relationship. Janey’s construction of elaborate scenarios of desire and anxiety, which seem intended to increase her physical and psychological alienation, culminate quite early in the text with her increasingly disabling pelvic infection and with her exploration of her own sexual pathology: “Now I knew that Johnny hated me. I was still trying to remain calm, to be mature. My fever from my sickness rose real high, I think to 102°, and the pain in my ovaries increased. The thought flashed through my mind that I was getting off on all this. I was a masochist” (Acker 20).

Janey’s masochism, however, is particularly interesting in its parody and deconstruction of Masoch’s pathology, specifically in linguistic and gendered terms. At play in Blood and Guts is the slippage that has occurred between socio-cultural popularizations of “Woman” as inherently masochistic, and psychoanalytic analyses of masochism, as figured through Masoch’s texts, which posit a male gendered “victim” subject to his female gendered “torturer” — his “Venus in furs.” This split is particularly apparent in Deleuze’s theoretical approach to a revaluation of masochism. As Deleuze suggests:

...the masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him. It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself. Dialectic does not simply mean the free interchange of discourse, but implies transpositions or displacements of this kind, resulting in a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse. (“Coldness and Cruelty” 22)

Nowhere is this process more clearly outlined and inverted than in Janey’s “staged”

encounter with Johnny concerning the dissolution of their relationship, a crisis which in itself is manufactured and sustained by such dialectical maneuvering as that pointed out by Deleuze:

Janey: You're going to leave me. *(She doesn't know why she's saying this.)*

Father *(dumbfounded, but not denying it):* Sally and I just slept together for the first time. How can I know anything?

Janey *(in amazement. She didn't believe what she had been saying was true. It was only out of petulance):* You ARE going to leave me. Oh no. No. That can't be.

Father *(also stunned):* I never thought I was going to leave you. I was just fucking.

Janey *(not at all calming herself down by listening to what he's saying. He knows her energy rises sharply and crazy when she's scared so he's probably provoking this scene):* You can't leave me. You can't. *(Now in full hysteria.)* I'll... *(Realizes she might be flying off the handle and creating the situation. Wants to hear his creation for a minute. Shivers with fear when she asks this).* Are you madly in love with her? (Acker 7)

The performativity of the scene highlights the tactics that Janey employs to orchestrate her masochistic fantasy. The confrontation between Janey and Johnny self-consciously emphasizes its inherent constructedness, its *theatricality*, in order to undermine itself — the confession's claims to authenticity, to an imminent subjectivity, and to a readily identifiable "real." Janey's position within the text as a "false" I becomes an effect of her renegotiation of the masochistic contract which is evidenced in Janey's sexualization of the masochistic elements of suspension and disavowal. The "I" is always deferred and hidden behind the questions that never receive definitive or comprehensive answers. Within Janey and Johnny's exchange lies a gender politics which plays with the roles established by the masochistic contract — although a necessary slippage of roles within the masochistic relationship is accepted, the roles remain, nonetheless, gendered and de-eroticized, a strategy

that is subverted and reworked by Acker's text.¹

Specifically, Blood and Guts reinvests the masochistic body with the powers of the obscene and the erotic that it has been denied. The female gendered body, in particular, is figured as the locus for a hyper-eroticized sensibility that operates as a parodic counter-point to Masoch's barren aesthetic. The disintegration of Janey's socially coded body is implicated in the performances of the "pain" of heterosexual love that motivates her confession. The diseased body is simultaneously figured as a sexual object and as a disruption of the economies of sexuality and desire that construct the use-value of the gendered body. Janey's abduction and subsequent rejection by the slave trader broadly outlines the imperiled position of the gendered body within the social. The tension here operates to articulate the masochistic dynamic that exists, for Janey, as a condition of her embodied instantiation into the normalizing paradigm of heterosexuality. Janey's abjected body is thus both her imprisonment and liberation from those societal structures that inscribe and locate her "self" within gendered discursive formations. The elements of suspense and disavowal which mark the masochistic fantasy become actualized upon Janey's dissipating body, blurring, in the process, the boundaries that have been traditionally held to separate the "real" from the "fantastic."

Blood and Guts in High School, within the context of the confession as a masochistic

¹ Deleuze notes of Masoch's works that the absence of the obscene is both a function and prerequisite of a specifically masochistic pathology: "In the work of Masoch, imperatives and descriptions. . . achieve a transcendent function, but it is of a mythical and dialectical order. It rests on universal disavowal as a reactive process and on universal suspension as an Ideal of pure imagination; the descriptions remain but they are displaced or frozen, suggestive but free from obscenity" ("Coldness and Cruelty" 35).

contract, is an examination of *enclosures*, and of the power of the obscene, the abject, to transform and redefine the various systems of imprisonment to which the body is subjected. Within the text relational identificatory concepts such as “father” and “daughter” become free floating signifiers which trace the trajectories of desire without being regulated by the laws that govern the relationship between signifier and signified. This undermining of the “word” of the “law” is a challenge to the masochistic contract in its nascent state, with its limits, its specificity, pointing at once to that end-point contract that sets no limits in its flow towards self-dissolution, that in its indeterminacy becomes its own antithesis, an anti-contract that transcends and deconstructs itself: “The plants in her room cast strange, beautiful shadows over the other shadows. It was a clean, dreamlike room. He fucked her in her asshole cause the infection made her cunt hurt too much to fuck there, though she didn’t tell him it hurt badly there, too, cause she wanted to fuck love more than she felt pain” (Acker 21). The ritualization of the “love act” by Janey evokes the themes of “coldness and cruelty” that Deleuze traces in Masoch’s works. Here, however, Janey does not merely set the terms and conditions of the act *as* masochistic *victim* but, as well, she performs with the *distance* and *calculation* of Masoch’s mythologized “torturess.” The frozen details of the room’s topography, the removal to third person narration all suggest that abstraction and suspension of the “real” that comprises the masochistic experience: “What characterizes masochism and its theatricality is a peculiar form of cruelty in the woman torturer: the cruelty of the Ideal, the specific freezing point, the point at which idealism is realized” (Deleuze, “Coldness and Cruelty” 55). For Janey the realization of the Ideal is contained in that “love” which is always already deferred, rerouted, and

circumvented.

The deconstruction of the gendered body that is enacted by Blood and Guts plays with the discursivity of the body as it is performed through conceptualizations of law and transgression. As Sade's libertine Delbène remarks, "...laws alone create the crime, and the crime is gone as soon as the law ceases to exist" (Juliette 66-67). In the textual universe of Blood and Guts, both law and transgression are radically reconfigured and recontextualized in order to reveal the history, memory, and politics of gender and sexuality, the way these identities are actualized within and upon the posited "female" body. Janey's "story" charts the laws and transgressions of "femininity" within the machineries of power and desire that regulate bodies within the socius. Thus, the degeneration of Janey's body throughout the text is a comment upon the construction of her body from without by patriarchalized social forces as much as it is an exploration of the potentials of "becoming-woman" which, as Camilla Griggers suggests, "is to enter the micropolitics of becoming-molecular, to pragmatically enter the flows of matter and signs that have made up the turbulent and proliferating histories of the feminine. . .and to understand the delimited yet real possibilities for transformation that those histories afford" (xi). For Janey, it is the histories of heterosexual "love" that are marked upon her body, that are the "blood and guts" of her experiences as she negotiates through the gendered mythologies of Western culture. The transformative potentials that Griggers points to are, within the context of Janey's story, the potentials of the abject to implode those systems which domesticate and normalize the body. Institutionalized structures such as the "family" are thus "perverse," as are the bodies that inhabit those structures.

In the spaces of alterity (the incestuous family, the sex trade, the pornographic) that Acker's Blood and Guts in High School examines, the body as a locus for and indicator of the human subject emerges fractured, disabled, and finally, irretrievably dissolved. The gendered body as a site of violence and abjection interrogates, through its integral monstrosity and fragmentation, the discourses of the social that proscribe the relationships between the bodies that are collected within the socius. The identification of socialized bodies involves a process of heterosexualization that limits the performativity of gender signs and directs the flows of desire that have the potential to destabilize the various structures that regulate bodies within the social order. The bodies in Blood and Guts operate according to deauthorized flows of desire that refuse to, that *cannot*, sustain the illusions of coherence and homogeneity that the socialized subject erects. Thus, Janey's body is figured as "diseased" in a specifically gendered manifestation of the *anxiety* of the masochistic body.

Janey's pelvic inflammatory disease becomes an externalization of the pain of heterosexual love that informs Janey's experience — a love that marks itself upon the female gendered body in the form of Janey's PID, and her abortions: "Having an abortion was obviously just like getting fucked. If we closed our eyes and spread our legs, we'd be taken care of. They stripped us of clothes. Gave us white sheets to cover our nakedness. Led us back to the pale green room. I love it when men take care of me" (Acker 33). Janey's sexuality is mediated by the technologies that control and produce the gendered body. For Janey, the effects of heterosexual love that are inscribed upon and within her body become ironic signs of her own complicity with, and paradoxically, control over, the flows

of power and desire that govern the gendered body. As Maurice Charney points out in Sexual Fiction, “[o]pen and enslaved make for a difficult paradox, but to be completely accessible and available is also to remove all barriers between oneself and the world. This kind of enslavement is also the only true freedom” (69). For, within the masochistic dynamic, the “real” is displaced by the performance of its own simulacrum. In effect, as Charney’s paradoxical equation suggests, it is fundamentally the very inability of language and codes of meaning to reveal, express, or understand that constructs marginal spaces and bodies. Boundary positions, once placed as deviant or incomprehensible, are pathologized “fantasies,” always already on the periphery of some singular reality. Thus it seems for both Charney and Janey (it is also important that Charney’s paradox is articulated within his analysis of Pauline Réage’s Story of O), that the masochist controls precisely by relinquishing control, by desiring and willing their own enslavement. Janey’s abortions, her PID, and later, her cancer all signal this contradictory engagement with, and usurpation of, the “real” as it is charted upon the body.

The fragmentation of the self that is marked through the body’s various dissolutions articulates a critique of the identified and naturalized “I.” Janey’s account which constructs an affinity between the state of abjection and the performance of sexuality is also, in itself, an exploration of a denatured love, no less “ideal” for all its monstrosity and abjection:

My bedroom is the huge white hexagon in the front left corner of the hotel. It has no clear outside or inside or any architectural regularity. Long white pipes form part of its ceiling. Two of its sides, which two is always changing, are open.

My bedroom’s function is also unclear. Its only furniture is two barber’s chairs and a toilet. It’s a gathering place for men.

Hotel men dressed in white and black come in and want to hurt me. They

cut away parts of me. I call for the hotel head. He explains that my bedroom used to be the men's toilet. I understand.

My cunt used to be a men's toilet. (Acker 36)

Janey makes explicit the politics of gendered desire and the histories that inform gendered desire — a strategy that allies itself with Grigger's exploration of the processes of "becoming-woman." Janey's body operates as a critique of the unified subject by problematizing the regime of signs that invest the subject with its various powers and authorities. Thus Janey's body as a production of the discourses of gender and sexuality is that abject site of the historicized "Woman" — a vessel for the waste and the superfluous, the excesses, of normative society.

Janey's relation to the world is through that of the obscene. As Janey points out, it is the obscene, the perverse, that carries within it the power to communicate the world as sensate, as "blood and guts," both displaced from and entrenched within language. This is the struggle of the thetic to transcend itself, and to transform itself into the non-thetic: "I'm not trying to tell you about the rotgut weird parts of my life. Abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortions is the only real way I can tell you about pain and fear. . .my unstoppable drive for sexual love made me know" (Acker 34). Men's toilets and abortions signify, in the context of Janey's sexual confession, the inversion of the purity of a Platonic ideal love. Love, and the construction of gender roles within the paradigm of love, is for Janey an underworld whose desires are excremental and violent, a carnal obscenity within which Plato's spiritual ideal is subjected to the politics of the eroticized body.

The men's toilet becomes the geography of Janey's masochistic desire as it is played out

through the text. The space itself is as indeterminate as it is specific. Its form, constantly shifting and irregular, is both inside and outside the patriarchal structures of power and subjectivity that it appears to suggest. For, within this “gathering place for men” that marks Janey’s “unstoppable drive for sexual love,” exists “her” bedroom, a parodic “room of one’s own” that functions on a metonymic level, as does Woolf’s “room,” as an ironic comment upon Janey’s textual status as the author of her own experiences. Janey’s room, immersed as it is within the discourses of masculine authority is its own kind of freedom, that “open and enslaved” freedom that Charney announces. It is not a permanent enclosure, as the transitory and artificial context of the “hotel” in which it is situated suggests. Janey’s room mediates between the marginal “imaginary” and the phallic “symbolic” in ways that do violence to both constructions.

Janey’s room and sexual confession operate as incursions into male-identified sites of power and discourse, what Michel de Certeau would term strategic “raids,” critiquing, as it pillages and burns, gender and sexuality as effects of linguistic structures. For Janey, gender and desire are political structures that are shifting, not only effects of other relations and spaces of meaning, although they are this too. This question of the gendered nature of linguistic representation, of writing as a gendered experience, has an interesting relationship to an almost “aside” remark that Cora Kaplan makes in her essay “Wild nights: pleasure/sexuality/feminism:”

The walls and doors of the women’s lavatories at the University of Sussex library were, and are, covered with women’s writing. From this lowest seat of high learning a polylogic testimony to women’s entry into discourse can be read in the round. . . .if young women can shit *and* write, not for some patriarchal pedant, but for each other’s eyes only, what vestiges of Victorian

constraints remain? (182-183)

Leaving aside some of the problematics of Kaplan's analysis, what is striking is the locus of the toilet, not only as a space for women's writing but also for the slippage between the public and the private that Janey's description of her room examines. Kaplan's anecdote, additionally, begs the question, "What of women's writing in men's lavatories?" The space of the lavatory, however gender specific it may be, is hardly inviolate. The openness of Janey's room, enclosed as it is within the men's toilet, expresses this very violation of both discourse and gender. The private communications of "men" are exposed through Janey, signaled by the violence that is inscribed upon her body — in her reduction to part-object as it comes into contact with patriarchal opposition and the institution of gendered identity: "They cut away parts of me. . . . I understand. My cunt used to be a men's toilet" (Acker 36).

The illusion of the "whole Woman" cannot be sustained here, indeed Janey refuses its essentializing claims and romanticism by exposing it to the violent images of "Woman" as part-object, as "Cunt." No utopian possibility exists in between the two, as evidenced in Janey's self-fragmentation. The dissolutions of body and self that Janey experiences charts the futility of conceiving of gendered absolutes. The boundary space of the obscene within which Janey locates herself involves a process of self-fetishization that subverts the patriarchal culture of the men's toilet that Janey has been inserted into. The moments of excess and the excremental, which are the "histories" of Janey's gendered experience, are signaled by Janey's evocation of her "Cunt" as an image which is both embedded within a masculinist economy of desire, as well as within signifying systems in which the encoding of desire is opened up to various contradictions, reappropriations and slippages. Lucienne

Frappier-Mazur argues that “[t]he obscene word exposes not only the erotic body of the woman, but also that of the man. This raises two questions: that of exhibitionism and that of gendered desire. Exhibitionism is a corollary of the wish to expose the other’s body. . . . If the narrator is female, such descriptions take on an additional significance, that of inscribing the woman’s desire” (218). Taken in the context of Janey’s self-revelations we see a desire to expose the body in a language which mimics, and parodies, the language of masculine desire. Janey’s self-reference to the function of her “cunt” as a container for male excess and waste underlines through its self-reflexivity the distinction that Frappier-Mazur outlines between the subject and object positions of the obscene articulation. In Janey’s case, she is both subject and object operating through the agentic mechanisms of the obscene. Her desire is registered upon her body, rendering her both as voyeur and exhibitionist simultaneously.

This blurred positionality of the subject-object that informs Janey’s sense of self is marked by a momentariness and indeterminacy that is countered by states of “freezing,” an immobility that is characteristic of the masochistic aesthetic:

You, the thing you called ‘you’, was a ball turning and turning in the blackness only the blackness wasn’t something — like ‘black’ — and it wasn’t nothingness ‘cause nothingness was somethingness. The whole thing turns up into a ball, the ball’s ephemeral, and where are you? Your self is a ball turning and turning as its being thrown from one hand to the other hand and every time the ball turns over you feel all your characteristics, your identities, slip around so you go crazy. When the ball doesn’t turn you feel stable.

You exist in this darkness. Rebels. Creeps. Outcasts. Loners. (Acker 55)

Alienation is constructed, here, as an alienation from self. What is important, however, is the underlying sense of the self as an illusion that is constructed from a set of shifting and

variable identities and characteristics. The self becomes a virtualized effect of the negotiation from the margins to the center of the socius — a reductive process whereby the integral fluidity of identities is stopped up and channeled to produce the illusion of motionlessness, of stability of being.

The operative discourses at work here concern the dialogue that exists between senses of control and the mythologized body. The “real” and the “ideal,” as they are played out anarchically in the text of Blood and Guts, reveal the artifice of the essential self that is actualized through the subversion of its very possibility. The self, in constant motion, can only be understood, grasped, and concretized by imagining itself as a frozen constant. The very “reality” of the self is thus always already problematized, aestheticized, and bracketed. Gilles Deleuze aptly states the discomfiture that the “real” presents when he argues:

The idea of nonbeing appears when, instead of grasping the different realities that are indefinitely substituted for one another, we muddle them together in the homogeneity of a Being in general, which can only be opposed to nothingness. The idea of the possible appears when, instead of grasping each existent in its novelty, the whole of existence is related to a preformed element, from which everything is supposed to emerge by simple “realization.” (Bergsonism 20)

Deleuze argues for a kind of quantum theorization of the self against its reduction into the stultifying edifice of the One. Janey explicates the potentials of the multiple (in contradistinction to the “possibilities” of the One) through the fable of the Monster, the Beaver, and the Bear. It is the Bear who occupies the sphere of the Other to the homogenizing unit that the Monster and the Beaver form. It is the Bear who gives “voice” to the darkness of the “Rebels. Creeps. Outcasts. Loners” (Acker 55), thus displacing the narrative from Janey’s confession at the same time that it refers back to it because of its

enclosure within both the text and Janey's ongoing discourse concerning the dissolution of her "self." The intertextual play evokes Deleuze's multiplicity of reality in its fragmentation and plurality of voice.

The *incompleteness* of the position of the self is always conflictual, as the fable illustrates through the Bear's meditations and madnesses, and through Janey's struggle to "understand" and thus contain the flux of the "real": "I get hysterical when I don't understand. Now everything's OK. I understand" (Acker 12). Consequently, in the scene involving Janey's uncertainty concerning the function of her bedroom, her desire again to "understand" the violence to which her body is subjected signals the limitations and boundaries of a unitary "real" that seeks to oppress and control Janey's performance of self. Janey's evasions of and submissions to the "real" are necessary paradoxes within the masochistic dialectic which is predicated upon "reversal, disguise and reduplication" (Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty" 22).

The question of the signifying systems within which Janey locates her self and within which gendered spaces of writing are constructed is reduplicated with Janey's imprisonment by the Persian slave trader. Janey's confession becomes a complex response to the slave trader's "philosophy of psychology" and his idealization of "Culture":

'Where does culture come from? I will tell you. It comes from disease. All the great artists, Goethe, Schiller, and Jean-Paul Sartre — you must read *Nausea* in the French, in English it is nothing — have said this. They are aware how evil they are. They are aware this life is truly evil; due to this awareness, they are able to go beyond. You know that medically, I am a doctor, a body cannot live without disease. (Acker 64-65)

As Janey points out earlier, Mr. Linker, the slave trader, is a "materialist" who has turned

himself into his own simulacrum: "He had become a real image, a fake" (64). Mr. Linker's constructivism underlies his desire to reinvent the human: "And so Mr. Linker became a lobotomist" (64). Janey's imprisonment and instruction in the art of being a "whore" by Mr. Linker is the realization of Linker's theory that in order to transcend the body, and to actualize the possibilities of the body's plasticity, the body must first be grasped as truly abject. The abject, as the essential nature of the human, must be imposed upon the body as an epistemological practice.

Janey acts from an almost persistent interpretive position which becomes the impetus for her confession and her interrogation of the construction of "Woman" within patriarchal discourse: "Janey lived in the locked room. Twice a day the Persian slave trader came in and taught her to be a whore. Otherwise there was nothing. One day she found a pencil stub and scrap paper in a forgotten corner of the room. She began to write down her life. . ." (65). Janey plays with pornographic conventions, specifically the genre of the "whore's confession" which was popularized in the eighteenth-century, to reveal the inherent constructedness and simulacral nature of voice and subjectivity as indicators of an authentic and "present" reality. In "The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette," Kathryn Norberg suggests that the whore's confession is fraught with the tensions of an undermined or absent sense of agency. Norberg, moreover, maintains that "[t]he first person narrative. . . is not a device that empowers the prostitute or conveys female subjectivity" (230). Norberg continues to state that "[t]he libertine whore is a reflection of male sexuality and a mirror of man's lust. . ." (230). Certainly there is an ambiguity surrounding Janey's self-representations in which she acknowledges her own complicity

with the actualization of male desire, but at the same time she refuses the passivity that this position seems to suggest. As Janey states, "We all live in prison. Most of us don't know we live in prison" (Acker 65).

Janey's fundamental critique of the problem of voice and agency parallels Norberg's argument concerning the status of the "I" of the confession. Janey's "book report" on Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter deconstructs Hawthorne's representation of the "feminine" by recovering the characters of both Hester and Pearl within the narrative, and by re-writing them as ideals of the chaotic and the uncontrolled that always already exist beyond the canonical "meaning" of the text. In her analysis Janey contradicts Linker's positioning of "Literature" as outside the sensual and the carnal:

Hawthorne gives us a description of motherhood in the fucked-up society: All the people around Hester hate her and despise her and think she's a total freak. The kid's beyond human law and human consideration. How do you feel about yourself when every human being you hear and see and smell every day of your being thinks you're worse than garbage. . . . You sense the people around you aren't right: what you did, your need, you weren't defying them to defy them, it was your need, was OK. You don't know. How can you know anything? How can you know anything? You begin to go crazy. (Acker 67-68)

Janey explicates, through the character of Hester, the conflicted status of "woman" as she is constructed as an effect of cultural discourse. As part of the mechanics of the confession, Janey is charged with the injunction to "reveal," to "SEE," as Linker enjoins. Janey subversively employs these charges in order to construct a kind of *ars erotica* drawing upon the concepts of pleasure and intensity of experience to deconstruct conventional representations of "truth." Janey's Hester bears a paraxial relationship to Hawthorne's Hester, threatening both the canonical positionality of Hawthorne's text as well as its

historiographical premises. Janey's "report" inflicts the same violence upon Hawthorne's text as she finds within the regulation of sexuality and gender in Western culture.

Janey focuses on and revels in her production of simulacral texts which expose the always already contingent and discursive nature of the "real." Janey's appropriation of Hawthorne's text enacts Baudrillard's theorization of "object practices" which refuse systemizations of meaning: ". . . it is equivalent to returning to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting meaning, like a mirror, without absorbing it" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 85-86). By uncovering an alternative Hester within Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Janey finds a celebration of the state of abjection that is that form of subject-refusal to which Baudrillard's theorization points:

Pearl's four years old. She's as wild as they come. *Wild* in the Puritan New England society Hawthorne writes about means *evil anti-society criminal*. Wild. Wild. Wild. Going wherever you want to go and doing whatever you want to do and not even thinking about it. 'Why did you get stoned?' the Persian slave trader asked me this morning. In 'primitive' 'wild' societies like Haiti the word 'why' doesn't exist. Pearl, according to Mr Hawthorne, wears hippy clothes and runs around in the forest and makes no distinction between what's outside her and her dreams. On the whole she doesn't make many distinctions. (Acker 93)

Pearl's immersion of her self within the world is similar to that loss of self that Janey verges on, and at points experiences, throughout *Blood and Guts*. This dissolution of self merges with Janey's exploration of and desire to "know" love as a kind of mystical submission. Janey's self-constructed exile from Mexico and Johnny is rewritten through her evaluation of *The Scarlet Letter*. As Rod Phillips suggests in "Purloined Letters: *The Scarlet Letter* in Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*," Hester and Janey "both are 'prisoners' of their own desire to be loved" (175). What is implicit in Janey's reappropriation of canonical

texts and language is a critique of claims to “authenticity” and “authority” that such master narratives purport. As Hawthorne’s text becomes a way for Janey to interrogate her own “autobiography” and the mechanisms of captivity that inform her experiences with the world, so too are the Persian grammar book and Janey’s encounter with Genet implicated in the gendered structures of “love” and “self” that Janey’s “story” seeks to transform, or, to “see” differently.

Pearl occupies, explicitly, the site of the abject. “Anti-social,” within the discourses of power and knowledge that construct domesticated identities, is equivalent to the “pre-social.” Pearl is thus always already perverse and monstrous because she is outside of the institutions that encode and regulate gender difference and sexual behaviour. As Janey points out, Pearl is mythologized as the essential predator because she has been produced as a “visible” sign of the abject, eroticized, and hence “obscene” body. Pearl is a violent rejection of the ethics of Puritanism which found American cultural values and iconography. “Woman” as a discursive construction, in this sense, is part of the iconic regime of signs that function as homogenizing forces within the socius.

Janey proposes the constitution of new languages and meanings that are marked by multiplicity, indeterminacy, and the potentiality of infinite substitutions. As Janey’s grammar lessons reveal, all is a process of translation, and to succumb to uncritical reproduction is perhaps the greatest capitulation of all. In a section entitled “translate into English,” Janey writes:

The streets are black. You haven’t fucked for a long time. You forget how incredibly sensitive you are. You hurt. Hurt hurt hurt hurt hurt. You meet the nicest guy in the world and you fall in love with him you do and you manage

to get into his house and you stand before him. A girl who puts herself out on a line. A girl who asks for trouble and forgets that she has feelings and doesn't even remember what fucking's about or how she's supposed to go about it cause she wasn't fucked in so long and now she's naive and stupid. So like a dope she sticks herself in front of the guy: here I am; understood: do you want me? No, thank you. She did it. There she is. What does she do now? Where does she go? She was a stupid girl: she went and offered herself, awkwardly, to someone who didn't want her. That's not stupid. The biggest pain in the world is feeling but sharper is the pain of the self. (Acker 86-87)

The nature of desire becomes a problem of translation as the text shows. Janey's passage indicates the variability and instability of communication and meaning. Positioned as it is within her report on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Janey's Persian grammar lesson becomes a sign of the futility of language to express the inarticulate pain of her being, thus the requirement of ceaseless transformation and translation. Culture becomes the site of contestation upon which Janey's desire is encoded. For Linker, "Literature" is the abstract realization of "Culture" — a body that is purified of its bestiality, its diseases of the flesh. Janey deconstructs Linker's theorizations, not only through her re-writing of The Scarlet Letter, but by calling into question the idealization of language and its ability to "authentically" represent any kind of "real" — as the incursion of the grammar lesson reveals, the process of interpretation is itself a translative process.

In the counter-epistemology that her confession details, Janey seeks to distinguish between the socio-cultural naturalization of female masochism and her own desire to control pain and to understand it in terms of intensity of experience. Masochism, as a politics of the *sensate, aware* body underlies Janey's quest to "know" the myths of sexual love:

Everything takes place at night.
In the centres of nightmares and dreams,
I know I'm being torn apart by my needs,

I don't know how to see anymore.

I'm too bruised and I'm scared. At this point. . .in my life politics don't disappear but take place inside my body. (Acker 97)

The translation of desire into discourse constructs simulacral bodies and technologies which articulate Janey's politics of the masochistic body. Making the body a political entity, for Janey, involves the reinvention of pain, submission, and fragmentation as subversive practices. The sexual body placed within discourse is always already suspect and fantastic, as the confession finally *makes* apparent. Thus Janey's deferral of the "real," of the public, is a condition of her rejection of the space of subjectivity as the site for "authentic" modes of agency and politics. Janey's play with the "false I" of the confession enacts a displacement and revaluation of the systems of power that subordinate fantasy and the private to the "real," and the real's focus on the public as a site of the legitimation of experience. The politics that Janey advances is a politics of bodies that exist on the borders of the social, in the margins of discursive formulations — bodies that are fetishized as objects of fantasy, and that are immobilized by their entry into the real.

As Janey's confession constructs slippages between the fantastic and the real, inside and outside, and the private and the public, there is a fundamental ritualization of the production of desire. The uncertainty of the "real" within Janey's confession points to the very epistemological and ontological instability of the social and its constituent discourses. Desire for Janey, within this context of fluidity, subverts the very discourses (legal, medical, historical, etc.) That seek to define and control the production of desire as an effect of the social:

'EVERY POSITION OF DESIRE, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, IS CAPABLE

OF PUTTING TO QUESTION THE ESTABLISHED ORDER OF A SOCIETY;
 NOT THAT DESIRE IS ASOCIAL; ON THE CONTRARY. BUT IT IS
 EXPLOSIVE; THERE IS NO DESIRING-MACHINE CAPABLE OF BEING
 ASSEMBLED WITHOUT DEMOLISHING ENTIRE SOCIAL SECTIONS.
 (Acker 125)

Janey's encounter with the figure of Jean Genet becomes enmeshed with her sexual fantasy of Jimmy Carter and her critique of American novelist Erica Jong. The politics of desire, and Janey's deconstruction of desire's instantiation into linguistic structures of representation, are central to the alternative, sexualized historiography which, under Janey's direction, brings all three figures together as powerful projections of the repression of sexuality and erotic desire in Western culture. As indicators, variously, of the "deviant" (Genet), the "Christian" (Carter), and the "commodified" (Jong), Janey exposes their hypocrisies by actualizing their hidden desires through parodic repetition and recontextualization. Thus, Janey articulates the lust that lies in President Carter's heart, and reveals the inherent banality of Jong's "zipless fuck" as a metaphor for "women's liberation." For, as Janey's fantasies indicate, it is through the non-language of the obscene, the pornographic, that the full potential of desire to subvert social institutions and power relations is realized.

Janey uncovers the masochistic dynamic that underlies gendered constructions of love, but as her interlude with Genet shows, the very institution of gender *difference* renders the masochistic experience itself as variable. Janey's fantasies are inextricably tied to the various dissolutions of body and self that she undergoes. Janey's body is positioned as an oppositional practice to what she sees as Genet's re-entrenchment of gender difference. It is not surprising that Johnny, Linker, and Genet are joined by a common Sadean philosophy

in Janey's "telling." For Janey, the pains of love and self are inseparable from her gendered constitution within a patriarchalized "real" that is actualized through Johnny, Linker, and Genet, and their own practices and constructions of sexual love:

Janey to herself: Genet doesn't know how to be a woman. He thinks all he has to do to be a woman is slobber. He has to do more. He has to get down on his knees and crawl mentally every minute of the day. If he wants a lover, if he doesn't want to be alone every single goddamn minute of the day and horny so bad he feels the tip of his clit stuck in a porcupine's quill, he has to perfectly read his lover's mind, silently, unobtrusively like a corpse, and figure out at every changing second what his lover wants. He can't be a slave. Women aren't just slaves. They are whatever their men want them to be. They are made, created by men. They are nothing without men. (Acker 130)

The production of "woman" as a "real" identity is undermined by its relational status to, and dependence upon "Man" as the dominant referent within the economy of meaning and power. As Judith Butler argues, the relational condition upon which the *idea* of "Woman" depends is an effect of the "political construction and regulation of identity itself" (*Gender Trouble* ix). Janey's understanding of "Woman," in terms of her critique of Genet, takes Butler's assertion to its logical conclusion. Genet can only "become-woman" by immersing himself within the signs of "femininity" that construct the "history" of "Woman," as Griggers has pointed out. As Janey indicates through her confession, in the absence of any kind of legitimate or "authentic" real, identity is always already a fictionality, constructed according to the desires and requirements of the socius.

Genet cannot "become-woman" because, ultimately, for Genet, "Woman" is an aesthetic ideal which does not exist except in the realm of the imaginary or the fantastic. For Genet, every "woman" is the deferred and absent image of his mother who is his abject goddess, at once the object of both his tenderness and his cruelty: "'I'd be glad to slobber over her,'

I thought overflowing with love. . . .To slobber over her hair or vomit into her hands. But I would adore that thief who is my mother" (Genet, The Thief's Journal 14-15). Genet articulates what Deleuze terms "a masochistic art of fantasy" ("Coldness and Cruelty" 72). The mother as the suspended ideal can never be fully realized, as Janey's critique of Genet points out. Deleuze notes similarly of Masoch's aestheticization of the "feminine" that: "Reality. . .is affected not by negation but by a disavowal that transposes it into fantasy. Suspense performs the same function in relation to the Ideal, which is also relegated to fantasy" (72). Like Masoch, Genet does not desire to become his displaced Ideal, but to possess it.

Genet is understood as a cultural text that can be inscribed upon bodies — gender is an issue of performativity that radically distinguishes itself from the biologically sexed body. Janey, however, undermines Genet's construction of himself as "Woman," in turn, by exposing Genet's own implication within a decidedly masculinist and heterosexist structure of power and "being." For Janey, Genet's fundamental error lies in his encoding of gender difference as a function of the real. Genet's own marginality is overridden by his adherence to a phallic ordering system in which both "woman" and Janey, whose own status within the socius is ambiguated even further by Genet's systemization, are subordinate:

The hierarchy is (Genet has to explain the nature of the social world to her because she's American).

Rich men
 Poor men
 Mothers
 Beautiful women
 Whores
 Poor female and neo-female slut scum
 Janey.

Then he kicks Janey around and tells her to be worse than she is, to get down, there, down in the shit, to learn. Go to the extreme. To make the decision. Janey girl still has pretensions. She has to be drained of everything. She has to be disembowelled. (Acker 130-131)

Genet reproduces a conventional, gendered structure of being that locates Janey on the perimeters of the “human.” Janey is that “body without organs” that exists always at the limits of the socius, within the “decoded flows of desire” that Deleuze and Guattari theorize. Janey’s confession details the condition of being brought into the structural order of a domesticated, socialized desire that can only be understood in terms of “absence” — as Genet’s chain of being diagrams. As the text indicates, in order to be fully incorporated into Genet’s universe, Janey must literally become that ideal of absence, or pure desire — she must be emptied, “disembowelled.”

Janey’s transformation into Genet’s “object of desire,” ironically, involves her idealization of Genet as a transcendental possibility. Janey’s “loss of self” is prefigured by her re-construction of “self” as this ideal Genet, an ideal that is for Janey beyond the material problematics of body and gender that have marked her relationship with Genet thus far: “Little by little Janey begins to understand how beautiful Genet is. She’s so enamoured with him she’s creating him. Truth and falsehood, memory, perception, and fantasy: all are toys in this swirling that is him-her. She’s predicting her future” (Acker 131). Janey constructs a space of self-alterity that replaces and recontextualizes her body outside of the social. Janey sees in Genet a mirror to her own increasing fragmentation and dislocation. Unlike Janey, however, Genet can always *be*, precisely because he is part of that “real” which Janey can only know *through* him. The masochistic relationship that is fostered

between Janey and Genet becomes an externalization of Janey's desire to uncover the point at which the "I" slips into the "not-I" — the point at which the human subject is made abject.

Janey's reformulation of self confronts Genet's hierarchy with its own structural instability. As Janey points out, to disavow the integrity of the body and the self is to reveal the fundamental illusion of stability that such ordering systems posit. As Deleuze argues in "Coldness and Cruelty": "Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it" (31). The disavowal of the unitary self and Janey's subsequent *doubling* of self into "him-her" parodies Genet's own thematic obsession with the double as well as absorbing Genet's own confession in The Thief's Journal into her own Blood and Guts. The emphasis placed on abjection and imprisonment as eroticized conditions runs through both texts constructing a lineage of the outlawed body. Society, as it appears in the alternate histories of both Janey's and Genet's texts, is perpetually deferred and replaced by a fantasy of solitariness that itself is always already constructed under the threat of an imminent dispersal. The text, here, operates to uphold the principle of suspension that the masochistic dynamic demands.

It is through the text that the politics of "self unmaking" is made explicit. The future that Janey predicts for herself is intimately bound up with the act of writing as a deconstructive practice. Janey's self dissolutions become manipulated by Genet as a mode of production in terms of the abject text:

Her future: Genet spits on her and kicks her. The more she tries to be whatever he wants, the more he despises her. Finally she decides her black wool hood and dress aren't enough. If Genet thinks she's shit, she should be invisible. When she follows him around, she hides in the walls like a shadow. She secretly washes his dirty underpants. She takes on his moodiness and his hating. (Acker 131)

Janey "takes on" the characteristics of Genet in the same way that her confession becomes a mirror to Genet's texts The Thief's Journal and The Screens. Genet is subject to the same processes of inversion and decontextualization as Hawthorne because ultimately, for Janey, they both belong to the same universe of male texts. Janey becomes a shadow of Genet because, as Ihab Hassan suggests of the mythology of Genet: "The outcast rebuffs not only society but also the very order of things. He works against nature, invents his sex and self, in order to sever all ties with creation. No memory of a mother or of woman's flesh connects him to the earth" (Dismemberment 180). Janey exists for Genet, as with Johnny and the slave trader, as an image of a kind of theoretical woman, a sign of an order that is purely imaginary and intangible — outside of the real that is all "lice, rags and filth" (Genet, The Thief's Journal 49). It is not that "women" are not part of the general state of abjection which Genet describes, but rather that they are spectres who indicate the transcendent quality of the abject through their very ephemerality and absence within the text.

Janey's movement toward death signals both the culmination of her sexual quest as well as the logical telos of her masochistic politics. Janey's desire, which impels her toward death, actualizes the ritual of regeneration which completes the process of the mythologization of sexuality that the masochistic cycle enacts.² As the epilogue to Blood

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In "Coldness and Cruelty" Deleuze argues that "[t]he masochistic contract generates a

Blood and Guts announces: "Soon many other Janey's were born and these Janey's covered the earth" (Acker 165). The radical transformation of self that Janey seeks is constituted in her death. Janey's death results in both an endless multiplication and splitting of self that transgresses the limits of a unitary "real," and that reaches toward an undifferentiated and fluid realization of desire as a politics of the confessed body. This deconstruction of both self and body enacts what Rosemary Jackson terms the "subject in process" which "denounce[s] the theses and categories of thethetic, [and attempts] to dissolve the symbolic order at its very base, where it is established in and through the subject, where the dominant signifying system is re-produced" (Fantasy 178). Janey's rebirth is produced within the context of a mythologized "dreamscape" which refuses the real in order to reinvent itself as pure sensation. Consequently it is through the politicization and revaluation of the masochistic body that Janey is able to reveal the essential artifice that underlies all socialized identities and relations. As Blood and Guts makes apparent, "we create this world in our own image" (Acker 14), and as Janey's translations and transformations reveal, "the world" is many and infinite.

type of law which leads straight into ritual. The masochist is obsessed; ritualistic activity is essential to him, since it epitomizes the world of fantasy. Three main types of rite occur in Masoch's novels: hunting rites, agricultural rites and rites of regeneration and rebirth" (94).

Chapter Six — Conclusion: Mobilizing the Outlawed Body

I strapped on a box enclosing my naked breasts, with holes that spectators could stick their hands through. I said, "This box is the cinema hall. My body is the screen. But this cinema hall is not for looking — it is for *touching*. (Export 188)

Within the dissipative structures of the posthuman, the material body assumes a position of abject "suspicion." The flesh becomes fetishized under the fluctuating signs of the abject as a complex response to the violence that the abject inscribes upon the body. As the abject impinges upon and disrupts the mechanisms of subject-production within the socius, the "human" body becomes, increasingly, a site of fragmentation and "speculation." The primacy of the "question of the body" within socio-cultural discourse points to the fundamental importance of the "human" as a kind of "sacred trust" of the social. Essentially, it is a question of "recognition." The posthuman's reorganization of those spaces of the "familiar" offers an oftentimes disconcerting critique of the ways in which "we" seek to "know" and restrict the human body within and to the operations of the socius.

Valie Export's "Touch Cinema" articulates, through the "use" of her body as a performance, the politics that underlie Acker's texts. The gendered body, for both Acker and Export, represents the fetishization of the human as abject spectacle. The body is exposed as a public site — the "distance," or dynamic of concealment that privileges a kind of privatization of the body is deconstructed through Export's experiment with what is, in effect, a materialization of the gaze. The hands become a physical extension of the "line" of the voyeuristic "gaze" with the "object" of its desire. The "female" body as fetish is reappropriated through Export's reconsideration of the function of the cinematic,

spectacularized body. Export's performance reveals both the prohibitions that structure the socio-cultural production of gender, as well as the lines of transgress which separate the pornographic moment (the touch) from the classical aesthetics that govern the relationship between the art object and the discerning subject (the appraising gaze). The very notion of "Touch Cinema" confuses those boundaries, "making" the performative and political aspects of the gendered body "apparent" and tangible.

The gaze and the gendered body are mobilized in order to construct an oppositional set of epistemological and ontological practices that call into question the "means" by which the socius identifies and marks the bodies upon which it is predicated. The mobilized gaze is an integral function of the posthuman body. This "unfixed" looking displaces the ethos of the self that centers and defines the human against its manifold "others." The posthuman's deferral of meaning is important as a deconstruction of the "monstrous," and the "inauthentic" as the borders of the normatively "human." In Acker's texts, the criminalized body operates as a signal of the posthuman's disruption of hegemonic social and human orders.

The inability of the human to maintain itself as a point of constancy within the socius provides for the anxious production of the hyper-actualized subject as a buttress against the emergent posthuman. For Acker, the crisis of the human is identified in the self-reflexivity of the worlds she constructs which expose the impotence of the "real," and substitute an analysis of the "perverse," and the "monstrous" that has always already underwritten the histories of the human. The notion of the "outlawed" body that traces the limits of the real within Acker's texts offers a fundamental re-evaluation of the "place" of the abject within

identificatory systems. As Acker's texts show, the abject is no longer the "hidden" unconscious of the social. Rather, the abject comes to represent the conflictual and disordered nature of the posited human subject itself.

The image of the pirate is not only one of the few "constants" in Acker's texts, but as well, an appropriate metaphor for Acker's narrative tactics. As Gabriel Kuhn notes in "Life Under the Death's Head: Anarchism and Piracy":

Each individual body as a different quantum of energy, without any physical ideal; the importance of physical performance for each individual pirate, but without any absolute standard; the indivisibility of the body from all other activities; self-defense against domestication of physical powers; direct presence of the whole body in life on deck; an unmediated relation to the body, allowing comprehension of what material really means. That is the body of the pirate. (243)

The pirate operates in terms of a parasitical relationship with the socius, and as is often the case, it is not clear who is the host and who is the feeder. In the dystopian worlds that Acker presents, piracy, terrorism, and criminality are images of the abyssal self in the sense that it is a "self" that seeks to destroy all homogenizing structures, and indeed, structure itself. The text becomes a reconstruction of the space of piracy in which, as Kuhn suggests: "the question of the possibilities in piracy is mostly a question of space. If smooth spaces disappear, if all spaces are carved up, then piracy is finished. Indetectibility, like molecularity, is inseparable from piracy" (232). Acker's use of appropriation, repetition, and recontextualization function to assert the text as a "smooth" space against canonicity, and against the laws that govern "literature" as a formal structure.

Within the "fantastic" contexts through which Acker's "characters" manoeuvre, the materiality of the self takes on the ambiguity of the pirate's "indetectibility" and

“smoothness.” Indeed, as Kuhn suggests, the question of the body becomes paramount. This new corporeality, however, tends to evade definition, preferring a kind of “incomprehensibility” which refuses to pinpoint “what material really means.” Kuhn’s pirate, with her or his “unmediated relation to the body” seems perhaps more fixed than Acker’s pirated/pirating bodies who do not claim an “ideal” position, but who utilize the potential “smoothness” of the text itself as an arena from which to assemble transgressive identities and spaces. The alternative bodies that Acker constructs out of the detritus of the social mark the very ephemerality and contingency of the “real” through their multiple transformations and nomadism. Acker’s textual bodies become modes of displacement through which the “self” is never made either apparent or knowable.

The invocation of “visibility” by Kuhn in terms of regimes which limit “freedom” of bodily movement and “being,” is not accidental. As Foucault and other meta-historians of the disciplined, socialized body have noted, the control of modes of “seeing” is intimately bound up with the control and domestication of bodies. As Irit Rogoff outlines:

Broadly speaking, two critical traditions have historically converged on the apparatuses and discourses of vision and spectatorship: first, the gaze as an apparatus of investigation, verification, surveillance, and cognition that has served to sustain the traditions of Western post-Enlightenment scientificity and early modern technologies. Second the gaze as desire, which splits spectatorship into the arena of desiring subjects and desired objects, a separation increasingly tempered by the slippages between the ever-eroding boundaries of exclusive objecthood and coherent subjecthood. (“Other’s Others” 189)

What Acker constructs through her texts, and indeed requires, is a new way of “seeing” that exposes the illusory foundations upon which conceptualizations of the “real” are based. Acker requires the implementation of the mobilized gaze as it is enacted through the

outlawed body. The “self” and the “gaze” are exteriorized in Acker’s texts, foregrounding both their performative and constructed nature. Identificatory strategies are thus always already suspect and shifting. Self-presence is exposed as an illusion, an aspect of Acker’s deconstructive practices that is indicated by her frequent use of “dream maps,” a tactic which expresses not only the dissolution of the “self,” but as well, calls into question the boundary that seeks to separate the “fantasy” from the “real.”

The “dream maps” found in both Blood and Guts in High School and Pussy, King of the Pirates offer what Acker would term the “new language of the unconscious.” This language, inserted into the text, subverts traditional narrative structures and articulates the problematics of a gendered, materialist body. For Acker, the body cannot be approached as a pure “thing.” The body actively pursues the state of virtuality in order to evade its identified and essentialized “place” within the socius. Thus, the dispersal of the body’s material condition within Acker’s texts acts as a prelude to the deconstruction of gender and subjectivity that the text enacts. The “other” within Acker’s works is always already the normative self that “sees” and hence constructs the socialized body according to the notion of difference.

What Acker’s characters interrogate and reevaluate is the cultural assumption that links knowledge with specific, acculturated forms of vision. For example, in Empire of the Senseless, Abhor appropriates and remobilizes the power of the gaze in order to recover an agency and sense of self that were denied her within the masculinist regime constructed by Mark and Thivai. It is also important to note at this point that the conceptualization of the subject as the source for political agency is not necessary in order to effect action. In fact,

agency is removed from its ties with the subject in order to more clearly demonstrate the inherent *anxiety* of the subject confronted with the dissipation of its use value, and with the dissipation of its strangle hold upon that hazy realm of the “political.”

The quest, or “journey” structures which Acker’s texts modify and disorganize are effects of this remobilized gaze, of the subject/object in motion. The gaze never settles, the subject never coheres and displaces the object outside of itself; thus “knowledge” about both the “self” and the “world” with which the self must interact is always uncertain and unobtainable. This is the counter-epistemology which Acker’s texts construct. Through Acker’s counter-epistemological strategy the complexity of the self as its own personal mythology is charted. The deterritorialization of the “myth” from its entrenchment in universals and psychoanalytic totalizations of experience results in a reconstitution of “self” that is multiple and marked by an increasing sense of disorder and discontinuity. The limits of a conventional epistemological inquiry are shown through Acker’s revamped mythology whose “I’s” are always “lopsided.”¹

The bodies in Acker’s texts are similarly fragmented. They resist the ordering impulses of the social in order to interrogate the histories of the gendered body. By firmly locating themselves in the territory of the abject, Acker’s bodies explore the condition of the excrementalized, spectacularized body. The motif of the abortion elucidates the abject positionality of the female gendered body as it occurs within normalizing discourses. For both Janey and Don Quixote, the abortion signals the condition of the body as it is

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I refer here to Janey’s “lopsided I’s” in Blood and Guts in High School.

implicated in conventional structures of gender and sexuality. The body, through the abortion, becomes an eroticized object. It is not coincidental that for both Janey and Don Quixote, the abortion marks the “beginning” of their respective quests through the terrain of “heterosexual love.” As Georges Bataille suggests in Erotism: Death and Sensuality: “Erotism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children” (11). “Heterosexual love,” filtered through the abortion, is denaturalized and deprived of its privileged position within the socius.

The abortion is inextricably linked to the “suicided” mother within Acker’s texts, and thus to the locastean body, which becomes a simultaneously omnipresent and absent figure over Acker’s narratives. The locastean body functions as the logical telos of Acker’s counter-epistemology which radically reworks traditional conceptualizations of “female” gender roles. Locaste “is,” after all, an image of the contentious space which “Woman” occupies, and as Acker’s texts point out through Locaste’s effectual displacement to the borders of the text, always already a discursive construction that history and psychoanalysis locate patriarchally. The mother in Acker’s texts is ambiguous because “we” can only know Locaste through her effacement, for she hung “herself for shame and grief, while Oedipus blinded himself with a pin taken from her garments” (Graves 374). Fittingly, it would seem, Graves suggests in a *footnote* that it is more likely that Locaste’s suicide represented a protest against Oedipus’s patriarchal reforms (377); thus, she is truly the outlawed body. Acker plays with these two opposing accounts of Locaste in order to examine the constructed nature of gender formulations, and in order to theorize the potential trajectories that exist beyond and between oppositional discourses.

The worlds and individuals which Acker presents refuse assimilation into any kind of collective social structure. As many theorists have pointed out, the slippage that exists between the fantastic and the real inevitably results in a radical dislocation of the socius and its constituent institutions. As Rosemary Jackson notes, "[p]resenting that which cannot be, but *is*, fantasy exposes a culture's definitions of that which can be: it traces the limits of its epistemological and ontological frame" (*Fantasy* 23). Thus Acker's use of shifting gender identities, reworked mythologies, and other texts pirated from literature, history, and philosophy work against the constitution of any kind of definitive "real" because it is within the real that Acker locates the stagnation of experience and of the imaginative. The "fantasy" worlds that Acker constructs are no less abject and oppressive than the "real," but their liberatory possibilities lie in what Jackson has noted of the nature of the fantasy itself, in its inability "to give affirmation to a closed, unified, or omniscient vision" (*Fantasy* 15).

It is at the juncture of presumed closure that the mobilized gaze acts to disrupt the organizing principles of the "real." Subjectivity is thus deferred allowing for the often disconcerting free play of identities and selves that characterize Acker's work. The text, and the bodies that inhabit it, are fetishized, but self-consciously, so that the abject is brought forward as an integral counter-aesthetic of the outlawed, undisciplined body. The use of "fetishism" in Acker's texts is particularly interesting because of the anti-oedipal agenda that underwrites her thematic and structural experimentations. Thus, the fetish is not working within a model of castration anxiety. Rather, the fetish becomes a symptom of the collapse of the "real" to "mean," and signals the workings of the posthuman within the context of an always already paradoxical and spectacularized hyperreality.

The inverted fetish marks the point at which the “beautiful” and “glittering” surface becomes obscene as it is flipped inside out to reveal the abject, no less spectacular for all its “signifiers” of monstrosity. This revaluation of the nature of the fetish is an important aspect of Acker’s texts which revel in the horrors of everything “seen.” In this sense, the Freudian conceptualization of the fetish as “the processes of disavowal, substitution and marking” (Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity 5) is hyperactualized and reworked. The “real” is subverted because it is always already an illusory referent, and it is thus substituted with the fluctuating “signs” of its collapse: the modified, “inhuman” body. The function of the tattoo in Acker’s Empire of the Senseless works to elucidate the mechanics of the rehabilitated fetish as an integral “part” of the posthuman body.

The modified surfaces of the posthuman body are not just about the figuration of the outlaw, but as well, construct what is, in effect, a counter-aesthetics of the flesh. Acker’s recontextualized bodies reflect an abjected sublimity which is focused in and through their redefined constitutive “outsides.” Abhor, in Empire of the Senseless, perhaps most explicitly articulates the spaces of the posthuman as they are inscribed upon the body. As “part black, part robot,” Abhor represents both the socially marginalized body and the very limits of the human. Within the narratives of the posthuman, however, neither the social, nor the human, controls the production and distribution of identity. The posthuman operates as a condition of flux and thus the body is opened up to ceaseless redefinition and reorganization.

Acker’s texts perform what Deleuze and Guattari would call “transformational operations” upon the dominant texts of Western culture. The appropriation and inscription

of the posited “female” body with Western cultural productions are interrogated by Acker’s fantasies of the dislocated subject/object. As Acker states in Great Expectations:

Well you can say I write stories about sex and violence, with sex and violence, and therefore my writing isn’t worth considering because it uses content much less content and all the middle-ranged people who are moralists say I’m a disgusting violent sadist, Well I tell you this:

“Prickly race, who know nothing except how to eat out your own hearts with envy, you can’t eat cunt, writing isn’t a viable phenomenon anymore. Everything has been said. (123)

The ideological normativism that informs not only the “real” itself, but the narratives that underlie and give legitimacy to the real, is subverted by Acker’s incursions into the formal structures that lend the illusion of coherence to the socius. As the canonical text is wrenched from its position of power, so too is the gendered body denied its intelligibility and authority. The human and the social thus defamiliarized become implicated in the fantastic realm of the posthuman.

The posthuman, for Acker, is indicated not just by the reinvention of the body, but by the body’s repositioning of itself within the obscene, and the excess of signification that the obscene suggests. The social body *made* obscene is overloaded, indicating the futility of placing it as a fixed and unitary presence. This process of infinite redefinition disrupts the socio-cultural need to “know” and thus control the circulation of bodies within the “real.” The body and its identities within Acker’s texts are aleatory, commenting upon the inherent performativity of the posthuman body in its relations to its immediate context: context, because the body works dialectically with its surroundings, modifying and transforming them at will, there is no external, independently objective reality that exists outside of the body in Acker’s texts. What is central to the experience of the posthuman is its ability to

transmutate its immediate phenomenal “reality.”

In this fragmenting and recombinant construction of experience, Acker articulates a kind of quantum reality theory of the text which posits the text as a series of infinitely fluctuating potentials that dissolve the boundaries that are placed between inside and outside. In Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics, Nick Herbert clarifies the arguments of physicist Walter Heitler: “The observer appears, as a necessary part of the whole structure, and in his full capacity as a conscious being. The separation of the world into an ‘objective outside reality’ and ‘us,’ the self-conscious onlookers, can no longer be maintained. Object and subject have become inseparable from each other” (18). In the same way, Acker’s texts propose the notion of an “observer-created reality” that nonetheless is self-deconstructive, as Heitler’s theorizations on the nature of quantum reality holds. As the outlawed body impinges upon normatively conceived perceptions of the “real,” so too do the proliferating discourses concerning the function of the social body come into contact and dissolve each other by their very circularity. This represents, perhaps, a kind of abject idealism that privileges the erotic over the productive (reproductive) body. But what defines it as essentially *different* from a romanticization of the abject is its transgress into a hyper-idealism that is self-parodic, and above all self-substitutional.

In a sense, Acker rewrites Baudrillard’s scenario of Simulacra and Simulation in which he speaks of the “hyperreal” as a kind of ecstatic, ultra-nihilistic venture:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, meta-stable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have the chance to

produce itself — such is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer even gives the event of death a chance. (2)

What Acker questions, in contradistinction to Baudrillard, is the existence, formerly or presently, of any kind of definitive reality. Reality as a referent by which to measure or to know oneself or the world with any degree of certainty is, within the context of Acker's works, an illusion that has been maintained by the desire of the socius to control and police its perimeters. Acker's texts thus chart manifestations of *extraordinary* experiences — gender in flux, the body as a morphological and plastic entity (in Don Quixote, St. Simeon's transformation from a human male into a talking dog), etc. — or, in other words, the virtualized effects that lie, distinctly, outside of conventional understandings of the "real."

The space of the mythological, then, becomes an appropriate site from which to critique normative conceptualizations both of the "real," and the way the real is ostensibly experienced and realized. The myth, rerouted around the psychoanalytic focus on the figure of Oedipus, allows for an exploration of Iocaste and the politics of the suicided body through an analysis of the mobilization of the Iocastean body that itself is displaced and marginalized by the socius. The power of the myth to profoundly reshape both conceptualizations of the body and of the real is evidenced by its centrality within psychoanalytic logic. It is a kind of neorealism, what Arthur Kroker or Baudrillard would theorize as that heightened state of "hyperrealism" which is an effect of the *anxiety* of the "postmodern" condition in which the socius overcompensates for an increasing sense of fragmentation by overproducing signs of

the real.² The one difference is that for Acker's texts, the myth is not part of a nostalgic reworking of the "real," but rather, a determined refusal of the real. The hyperreality of the myth, within Acker's texts, stems from its parodic relationship to the signs of the real upon which it comments.

In Pussy, King of the Pirates, the importance of the use of myth to Acker's counter-epistemology is shown through O's journey from the brothel in China to the alter-world of the "girl" pirates: "The fortune teller told me that I would be free after I journeyed into the land of the dead. I was trying to get rid of loneliness and nothing would ever rid me of loneliness until I got rid of myself" (11). The constructed nature of both identity and the real comprise, for O, a prison of the self which can only be surpassed through the resources of dream and myth. The gendered body operates, within the text of Pussy, as the site upon which the conflicts between the mythical and the real are charted:

"I enclose a copy of the treasure map. Note that the island to which we'll be sailing looks like a dead woman's body. (If it wasn't dead, it couldn't be a map.)"

"Unfortunately the map in my possession has no markings that indicate the location on the woman's body of the buried treasure."

"I do believe that such a map exists." (187)

The female gendered body indicates an "other" reality that is significantly outside of conventional figurations of the real. In this sense the "woman's" body is always already that state of the crisis of the real that Baudrillard notes: "It is the generation by models of a real

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As Baudrillard states: "When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity and authenticity. . . . a strategy of the real of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence" (Simulacra 6-7).

without origin or reality: a hyperreal . . . *The desert of the real itself* (*Simulacra* 1). In Acker's texts the female gendered body mobilizes its spectacularity in order to access the supplementary worlds of dream and myth that are suppressed by the real.

The "fantastic" territories of Acker's textual worlds parodically indicate a kind of fetishization of experience that reformulates the "anxiety" of the oedipally oriented body. As Laura Mulvey notes, "[t]he fetish object fixes and freezes the historic event outside rational memory and individual chronology. But the fetish still stays in touch with its original traumatic real and retains a potential access to its own historical story" (*Fetishism and Curiosity* 5). For Acker's bodies, the very instability of the "real" problematizes any kind of recuperative process of the historical moment of "trauma." History itself is foregrounded as a constructed play of alternating fictionalities which allow for the unraveling of identity and subjectivity, and for the exposure of "history's" production of its own sustaining series of images and realities. As Acker's texts reveal, the premises upon which history, as a monolithic category of human experience, are based are as much about the construction of "belief" (as opposed to "knowledge") as the fetish. The outlawed body traverses these conflicting epistemologies as an operation of the processes of "becoming-subject."

The outlawed body becomes an oppositional effect of the institutionalization of identificatory strategies such as gender and sexuality, which deprive the body of its performativity. The fluctuating nature of the body thus criminalized is liberated from the confines of the social that both creates and dispels it. As well, the outlawed body represents, as Kuhn suggests of the pirate: "Max Stirner's 'ego' — which bears no relation to bourgeois

reactive 'indivi-*Dualism*' — but which destroys the preordained self, and makes concrete and constantly changing subjectifications into the active basis of life" (230-231). In the end, it is this subversive movement which mobilizes the outlawed body toward a politics of the abject, and which informs the multivalent tactics and manoeverings of Acker's texts.

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